TEACHER SELF-EFFICACY IN VISUAL ARTS

Examining Elementary Teacher Self-Efficacy in Visual Arts

By

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Abstract

The value of arts education is immeasurable, as detailed by numerous researchers, in its capacity to foster students’ critical thinking and problem solving skills, social and emotional development, multi-sensory perception, and appreciation of cultural viewpoints and contexts. However, the arts have unfortunately held a tenuous place in America’s schools, often regarded as an unnecessary frill, contrasted with the serious affair of learning. Operating amongst these tensions has been a growing surge of pre-service and primary teachers whose low self-efficacy has recently been found to negatively impact student development and appreciation of art. My research study aims to consider how elementary teachers’ self-efficacy affects visual arts education. In my findings, I shine an appreciative lens on the contributions of three generalist teachers in their mid-careers, as I outline their challenges, strengths and coping strategies as shared through the following topics of personal background experiences, classroom experiences, resources, assessment, communication, and teacher effectiveness. Through this research study, I hope to enlighten and encourage emerging teachers, as well as teachers well established in their careers, seeking to develop their self-efficacy, as it relates to successfully implementing a strong visual arts program in their classes.

Keywords: visual arts, art education, teacher self-efficacy, teacher perceptions, elementary classrooms, appreciative, marginalization
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Examining Elementary Teacher Self-Efficacy in Visual Arts

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Research Study

The positive influences of the arts are plentiful. As such, numerous researchers have spent time over the past fifty years documenting the impact of the arts in many different contexts, from their transformative capacity in schools to their therapeutic power in hospitals, delving into the rich intrinsic and instrumental value of the arts, and describing their invaluable potential in allowing individuals to tap into their natural creative capacities (Eisner, 1972; Carabine, 2013; Siegesmund, 2005; Dunn-Snow & D’Amelio, 2000; Malchiodi, 1988, to name but a few). Ontario’s revised Arts Curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009) reflects many of these beneficial claims and communicates several methods with which the arts can be taught in order to foster students’ critical thinking and problem solving skills, social and emotional development, multi-sensory perception, and appreciation of cultural viewpoints and contexts (Lummis, Morris & Paolino, 2014; Efland, 2002; McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras & Brooks, 2004; Eisner, 1972).

Given the immense value of the arts in education, it is troubling to find research samples taken from countries all over the world showing feelings of low self-efficacy in regards to the arts in pre-service teachers, especially those in early childhood education (Davies, 2010; Garvis, Twigg & Pendergast, 2011; Lummis, Morris & Paolino, 2014; Garvis & Pendergast, 2011; Gatt & Karppinen, 2014). This inadvertently affects students’ feelings and perceptions about their own artistic creativity which are carried on with them as they develop into adulthood (Hallam,
Des Hewitt & Buxton, 2014; Davies, 2010; Alter, Hays & O’Hara, 2009; Eckhoff, 2008; Gatt & Karppinen, 2014). There is a wide host of factors affecting teacher self-efficacy as explored by researchers, including the impact of school culture, the presence of resources, the collective support efficacy of teachers, the quality of pre-service teacher education, professional development, past experiences, curriculum pressures, and a perceived low status of the subject (Garvis & Pendargast, 2010, 2011; Davies, 2009; Gatt & Karppinen, 2014; Alter, Hays & O’Hara, 2009). Teacher self-efficacy beliefs play a vital role in affecting student outcomes in the classroom (Garvis & Pendergast, 2010). Due to the drastic change occurring in students’ self-perceptions of their own creativity from the primary grades to the intermediate grades, with the majority of students believing they are not creative by the time they are entering high school, it becomes even more important that teacher self-efficacy in visual arts is explored, understood, and supported especially in its potential influence on students’ development and success (Paul, 2012).

**Purpose of the Study**

This research study will focus on investigating the practices, struggles and coping strategies of elementary teachers who teach visual arts in their classrooms. Given the many recent studies that have pointed to a demonstrated impact in student development in visual art as a result of poor pre-service teacher self-efficacy in the subject, especially in early childhood education, (Garvis & Pendargast, 2010, 2011; Davies, 2009; Gatt & Karppinen, 2014; Alter, Hays & O’Hara, 2009) my study will aim to consider how teachers develop their practice further into their careers at the elementary level. The transformative potential in teaching the arts, as
highlighted in Ontario’s revised Arts Curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009), can put a lot of pressure on generalist teachers, who may be overwhelmed by the expectations placed on them to deliver a curriculum rich in content within an institutional context largely based on accountability policies and performance measures, as are found in provincial testing (Westheimer, 2010; Eisner, 1985). In considering arts education that encompasses dance, music, drama and visual art, I choose to focus on the teaching of visual art in my research, as this is the area in which I have the most experience and understanding.

**Research Questions**

There are a number of questions that I will address in this study; however, the main overarching question that will guide the research is: how do elementary teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs affect how they teach visual arts education in their classrooms?

Understanding that there is a broad scope of subjects that generalist teachers must teach in the grades four to eight curricula, I am interested in learning about how visual arts instruction is handled in these classrooms. How do teachers’ years of experience affect their confidence and comfort levels in teaching visual arts? What strategies do teachers use to cope with the challenges they may find in teaching visual arts? What strengths or skills do generalist teachers bring to teaching visual arts in their classes?

All of these questions will direct this research study, which aims to build a greater understanding of the strengths teachers bring and the struggles they encounter in their teaching of visual arts, as well as how teachers’ self-efficacy develops and affects their teaching as they progress throughout their careers.
Background of the Researcher

During my experiences as an elementary school student, art was mostly used as a means of extrinsic reward rather than a way of developing intrinsic motivation, critical inquiry, and creative thinking skills. Art activities would most often take the form of ‘cookie-cutter art,’ meant as simple entertainment such as teacher-driven product-based activities, or holiday crafts in the form of decorative Christmas or Valentine’s Day cards (LaJevic, 2013). I had always loved to draw and to paint, but did not receive the ample time and guided instruction in visual arts that I craved for in school. As a result, my parents placed me in a wide range of after-school visual arts programs so that I could experience opportunities to further my skills and ideas in visual arts with appropriate support including modelling and encouragement for self-reflection and growth. These programs developed my intrinsic motivation in practicing the visual arts as inspired by the informed guidance and constructive feedback of passionate instructors. I learned how to self-correct, critique, and make meaningful connections between my work and those of artists before me, fostering a deep appreciation for developed techniques based in their cultural and historical contexts. Because of these opportunities, I am able to enjoy visual arts as a form of expression, learning, and teaching today.

In secondary school, I realized that teachers emphasized test taking and essay writing; whereas creativity was virtually non-existent in the classroom. As a lover of the arts, especially visual art, I began to pursue artistic activities on my own time and also enrolled in an elective visual arts course. In this course, I found that the prevalent view amongst the few students enrolled was, regrettably, that the arts had little importance and were only meant for those few
who were talented enough to pursue them. These views reflect those of elementary school teachers that I have met while working as a student-teacher and a visual arts educator. These teachers, who appreciate the arts as a tool for student engagement, would often express doubts about their own artistic abilities; consequently, their teaching reflected this aversion in the form of limited degrees of visual arts instruction, of limited student-teacher interaction during arts-based activities, and of minimal guidance during the creative process.

I discovered a great degree of anxiety in elementary teachers, who would avoid introducing art-related activities to their students. Often in these classes I would see students busily drawing on the blackboard or on paper at their desks, or dancing and singing to the latest pop song during recess; to me it appeared that students were craving opportunities for creative expression. It was disconcerting to see the arts used so sparingly in learning contexts. In my adult experiences as a student-teacher, I have realized that in witnessing and experiencing the teaching of art, I feel it is still being presented in the same way as when I was a student. But now, I can recognize some of the struggles of teachers, working against conflicting feelings of self-doubt and apathy.

As an educator in an after-school visual arts program over the past five years, I have discovered the invaluable role of the arts in engaging student creativity and interest. Every class, I eagerly anticipated students approaching me with excited, widened eyes and curious appetites to ask about the art activity that we would be working on that day. Extending on these rich learning experiences, I have also worked as a mentor for at-risk youth where I organized activities focusing on sensitive issues like identity struggle and peer, family, and school-related pressures. In understanding the difficult nature of these topics, I could only think of the arts as a
powerful vehicle for personal expression, which helped students grow, learn, and even overcome their personal anxieties.

While organizing activities at a local YMCA for youth newcomers to help develop communication skills and integrate into Canadian society, I realized the unequivocal importance of using artistic media to communicate and form individual identity. Many of the youth had lived through extremely difficult and painful past experiences, a few having escaped from war-torn countries. For some, the idea of communicating in a foreign language was an unrealistic expectation for me to have of them. I discovered that arts activities lent access to other invaluable methods of learning and communicating that helped these youth develop their personal identity and voice. For students where English is not their first language, as is the case in many classrooms across Canada, I am curious to know more about teachers’ openness to using arts-based practices to engage students in learning. It is with this background as a student, coupled with my experiences as an art educator that I reflect on the purpose of art and how it is taught in schools in the present day.

My interest in this research study has been influenced by my positive, intrinsic experiences in visual arts education. As I have grown to appreciate art in my own practice as a pre-service teacher, I can also appreciate the struggles that a teacher might have as they emerge into this career, especially with no prior specialization and exposure to visual art. As a researcher with a strong visual arts background and as a beginning teacher, I believe I have an awareness of the struggles that teachers might face in their practice and a deeper appreciation for their efforts to strengthen their practice. I understand and anticipate the challenges that will be related to me by the teacher participants in this study, however I further look forward to hearing about the coping strategies set in place as teachers have progressed throughout their careers. With this
purpose, I am excited to learn about the stories of my teacher participants, and use this research project as an inspirational platform to change the conversation to the rich possibilities of a strong visual arts education.

**Overview of this Study**

The aim of this study is to explore the self-efficacy beliefs of elementary teachers with regards to their teaching practices in visual arts by shining a light on their strengths, challenges and coping strategies. Chapter 1 includes the introduction of this study, its purpose and subsequent research questions. This chapter also details my personal experiences that have led to my focused study as a researcher. Chapter 2 features an examination of pertinent literature, including the various theories and research supporting the benefits of an art education and existing tensions regarding its marginalized place in the institutional context of schools. The literature review will then extend into an examination of the revised Ontario Arts Curriculum, and the theory of self-efficacy as it is related to teacher practice in visual arts education. Chapter 3 will address the details and limitations of case study methodology and the appreciative inquiry approach taken in my study, in the process of data collection with participants. Chapter 4 will demonstrate my findings, gathered from the interview samples and organized according to pertinent themes and subcategories. Finally, Chapter 5 will draw connections from the findings to relevant theories and research discussed in the literature review. Also, it will address further areas for future research and recommendations for development of teacher practice in classrooms as they relate to my study.
Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The Arts in Education

Over hundreds of years, researchers and theorists have worked to uncover the origins of the arts and to validate their invaluable benefits to the development of human beings. As a result, a great body of research has accumulated in support of the arts in education, inclusive of learning in visual arts, music, dance and drama. My research focuses primarily on visual arts education, beginning with a discussion of theories relating to its many acknowledged values. In considering the various argumentative claims for a visual arts education, I seek to illuminate some of the numerous controversies regarding its place in an institutional setting as a means of emphasizing the tenuous relationship the arts has had with the education system in America (Wright, 2013). In my review of literature, I aim to highlight the vision of arts education, as portrayed in Ontario’s revised Arts curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009), which will then be set in contrast to the reality of practice in schools today.

The marginalized stance of the arts raises the question of how elementary teachers understand and respond to teaching visual arts in their classrooms, especially in light of recent research pointing to the decline of pre-service teacher self-efficacy all over the world (Garvis & Pendergast, 2010; Davies, 2009; Alter, Hays, O’Hara, 2009; Garvis, Twigg & Pendergast, 2011). This literature review ends with disclosing gaps in research on teacher self-efficacy in visual arts practices. In providing an in-depth portrayal of the research on this topic, I have organized this chapter into the following themes: Instrumental Benefits, Arts Intrinsic Value and its Marginalization, Understanding Creative Play, Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences,
Limitations of a Practical Mindset in Schools, Art for School Reform, Ontario’s Revised Arts Curriculum, Teacher Self-Efficacy, and Summary and Implications for Further Study.

Instrumental Benefits

Of the many benefits supporting an arts education as outlined by advocates, instrumental outcomes seem to be most popularly acknowledged and received by the public. Instrumental benefits are defined as, “indirect outcomes of arts experiences and are called instrumental because the arts experience is only a means of achieving benefits in non-arts areas” (McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras & Brooks, 2004, p.3). There are many researchers who have attributed benefits of arts integration into core content subjects, as a means of promoting increased cognitive performance and academic achievement of students in those areas (Baker, 2013; Doyle, Hofsetter, Kendig, Strick, 2014). Many researchers have resisted and outwardly admonished instrumental claims following the argument that these justifications have been damaging to the reputation of the arts, putting them in a place of further marginalization in schools, rather than fulfilling the intended goal of promotion and support (Eisner, 1998; Siegesmund, 1998; Bobick & DiCindio, 2012).

Elliot Eisner, one of these arts advocates, and a widely known researcher in the field of art education, approaches the vast majority of studies outlining instrumental gains with a critical eye. In his study, “Does Experience in the Arts Boost Academic Achievement?” Eisner (1998) argues that although there is much research promoting the arts, more often than not, this research does not provide any substantial evidence to the big claims being made, nor does the research provide sufficiently explained means of reaching these claims. Eisner outlines what a convincing
study should look like, and it is important that he addresses the need for there to be research done that is validated by empirical study and not simply based in theory alone, which he believes is damaging to the creditability of the field.

In his critical appraisal, Eisner (1998) questions whether or not these claims are made out of desperation due to the threatening surge of budget cuts alongside the pressures of upgrading America’s dysfunctional educational system. With the emergence of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in America, many advocates felt the pressure to relate the benefits of an arts education to other subject areas, rather than focusing on the arts on its own (Bobick & DiCindio, 2012). Throughout his critique, Eisner argues against the false initiative of researchers promoting an arts education who legitimize “the marginal position assigned to the arts by those looking for such justifications” (p.146). Eisner rejected the extrinsic rationales developed by others for arts education that support development in other subjects. The visual arts, grounded in Eisner’s (1972) vision, deal with an aspect of human consciousness, “the aesthetic contemplation of visual form” (p.9). As such, Eisner argues that arts education should not be valued solely for its contribution to other subjects, as it is thus marginalized and seen as supplementary; such as a potentially useful tool, but one that should only be used in times of convenience.

In response to Eisner’s persuasive argument, Catterall (1998) validates the claims of other researchers focusing on the instrumental outcomes of an arts education, by recognizing them as valued support. Any attention that emphasizes the benefits of arts education in any area is substantial, in Catterall’s view, corresponding with my own. Much like Catterall, I am positioned against a critical approach that does not support the overall initiative of promoting the arts, but rather is supportive of the active interest of researchers regarding the benefits of arts education in schools. However, Catterall also finds worthiness in Eisner’s precise attention to
arts-based outcomes, which concern the arts being studied for their own sake and for the intrinsic values that come with such a focus.

**Art’s Intrinsic Value and its Marginalization**

In their wide collection of published research aimed at reframing the debate about the benefits of the arts, McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras & Brooks (2004) rationalize the value of instrumental outcomes of an arts education as these relate to tangible results. A steady reliance and indulgence in the scientific rationale of academic achievement in schools, focused on measurable outcomes, has resulted in the marginalization of the intrinsic benefits in the arts that are exposed as intangible and unreliable in their claims. Intrinsic benefits are considered “inherent in the arts experience itself and are valued for themselves, rather than as a means to something else” (McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras & Brooks, p.3). As outlined by the researchers, these benefits point to the happiness and joy people may feel in arts experiences, as they develop a capacity to perceive and judge for themselves, to participate imaginatively and to empathize with others. Advocates believe that the intrinsic benefits, though difficult to define and measure, are of the greatest significance in the promotion of the arts. They are, however, reluctant to speak out more on the behalf of intrinsic benefits as a result of an existing fear that these ideas would not resonate with most legislators and policymakers with an expectation in improving educational performance and economic development (McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras & Brooks, 2004). The discomfort felt and reliability denied to that which is considered intangible in the arts can be linked to a devotion to a fixed, inflexible, public mindset that takes comfort in output-
oriented commoditized knowledge, over an education which is centered on a qualitative approach (McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras & Brooks, 2004; Eisner, 1985; Abbs, 2003).

**Understanding Creative Play**

Inherent to arts education are the intrinsic benefits rooted in creative inspiration and expression. Many researchers in the field of education have worked towards defining what constitutes a creative mind and how to inspire creative teachers and students in classrooms. Craft (2003) considers the concept of creativity in education and its many assigned definitions, stemming from a diverse array of culturally pluralistic viewpoints. From the Western point of view in particular, Craft distinguishes creativity as reflecting and responding to the wider world, which is important for development, “as continual innovation and resourcefulness have become necessary to economic survival” (p.113). Muddled in societal values of consumption, creativity is popularly misconceived as desirable solely for the utility and novelty in its output. There are those who argue, however, that by allowing this misconception to take root, we risk losing the understanding and value of what creativity essentially is, that which defines our humanity and our need for self-actualization (Hegarty, 2009). It is the creative experience that lives in leisure and play that many researchers have argued is the essential part of meaningful learning in the arts (Ryan, 2011; Saracho, 2002).

Researchers today are widely taking to the notion that unstructured play, especially involving the arts, is an essential component to student learning in early childhood education (Ryan, 2011; Saracho, 2002). It is in unstructured play that children are exposed to the act of creating scenarios, or circumstances, of their own imaginings, experiencing unanticipated
outcomes and increasing the possibility of deep immersion in the activity (Graham, 2009). More recently, researchers have been distinguishing the importance of play and creativity inherent in aesthetics, which includes “the perceptions of works of art, the emotional responses to judgments of beauty and the evolutionary roots of art making” (Stevens, 2014, p.99). In her study, Stevens approaches the topic of play and aesthetics through the viewpoint of developmental psychology; she explores the newest developments in neurobiology and its intersection with aesthetic experiences, which involve a non-thinking state to be learned and honed by combining reverie and a sense of active play. Drawing on the numerous research studies in developmental psychology as well as in arts education, Stevens’ study similarly acknowledges the need to think seriously about creative play’s role in education.

Alongside the tendency to stigmatize and belittle the importance of play, the tendency to think of the arts as an amusement or diversion from the seriousness of human affairs is a popularized bias in today’s society. Efland (2002) addresses and probes at this problematic societal tendency to think of the arts “as modes of entertainment, frivolous occupations, and elective options—“nice” cultural experiences to have if time and resources permit, but not major contributors to the cultivation of the mind or personality formation” (p.7). Throughout his book on integrating the visual arts into the curriculum, Efland raises a number of concerns regarding educators’ lack of awareness of the substantive role of visual arts and their uncertainty with assessment attainments. An incessant compulsion to rely on rigid models of assessment in classrooms problematizes the area of play in which the arts dwell, the multiple intelligences thrive, and the creative process is grounded.
Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences

In his exploration of the intersection between play and the multiple intelligences, as established by Howard Gardner, developmental psychologist and researcher, Eberle (2011) acknowledges the need for schools to take the freedom of play seriously, as it “enhances our skills and aptitudes and deepens our talents and capacities by exercising them in concert” (p. 45). With the emergence of Gardner’s (1983) theory of multiple intelligences in the early 1980s, educational researchers and theorists could appraise human ability more broadly, practically and fairly (Eberle, 2011). Standing against the narrow focus of past traditional measurements of intelligence, Gardner’s (1983) theory identifies students as having different types of intelligences: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalist. As much as it has been valued for its democratic character, the theory has opened the door to a spur of debates over its validity.

Over the years, Gardner’s (1983) theory has been criticized for the way it segregates students according to separate individual intelligences. This is a misapplication of the theory that has also contributed to the stunt in growth of the field of arts education (Groff, 2013). There are, however, many educational researchers who do not recognize the multiple intelligences as a means to stereotype or to track students, but as a collection of focuses that can be used as an engaging means “to hook students into learning” (Gullatt, 2008, p.218). According to Gardner, a student’s performance, as being judged by standardized test scores, is assessed according to the two intelligences, linguistic and logical-mathematical, and therefore encourages educators to teach according to these types, consequently limiting the degree to which students can show their learning and ability. Since its emergence, the theory has been widely adapted by educators in
schools, serving students through its increase in inclusivity and its support of differentiated instruction. Despite these gains, much encouragement is still necessary in changing and in enhancing the curriculum and policies to support freedom in play and learning in concert with the multiple intelligences, as much of schooling is based in the aims and measures of a scripted curriculum (Eberle, 2011).

**Limitations of a Practical Mindset in Schools**

While some educators believe that standards based on statistical results are a necessary component for arts education to be taken seriously, marginality is the outcome of this approach. Julia Kellman (1999) provides a voice to experienced artist educator Jo Leeds, whose thought-provoking perspective on standards and assessment in arts education echoes a similar thought stream of numerous artist educators. Because the arts are grounded in the discernment of qualities, Leeds states, having the teaching of art limited to the collection of numerical data “has a deadening effect on the whole enterprise.” (p. 43). A need to depart from the rigid, knowledge-based system of quantitative, standardized measurement is a repeated complaint brought forward by many educators within the field of arts education. It is not surprising then, with an educational system based on the accumulation of standardized scoring, that teachers are avoiding teaching qualitative reasoning in art education, as it is not “rule-based” (Siegesmund, 2005). Art teachers grow uncomfortable with the uncertainty that qualitative reasoning brings into the classroom, a problem that Siegesmund explores in his research: “in our efficiency-driven culture, it is hard work to take time to explore ambiguous meanings…the teacher has to follow the lead of the students, and this can feel like a loss of control” (p.11). A resistance in relinquishing control can
be attributed to a lack of confidence contributing to poor teacher self-concepts. This is a significant issue in the field of arts education today as it involuntarily contributes to the development of poor creative self-concepts in students, all of which is to be expanded on later in the chapter.

Qualitative reasoning is an important aspect of arts education because it is involved in engaging students towards creating their own meanings and becoming invested in their work (Siegesmund, 2005). The anxiety that teachers feel, described as a loss of control over students, has much to do with the compulsion to collect and assess student performance for the practical purposes of reporting measurable progress. The scientific rationalist framework occupying education mirrors the embedded practical mindset that many individuals carry with them in their everyday lives (Eisner, 1985). Such a mindset is easily propagated, and can then just as easily forget or misconceive the need for transcendence that art experiences offer (Abbs, 2003). John Dewey (1980) wrote famously on the nature of art as the quality of experience. The experience that art can bring about is a state of captivation, where “we are able to appreciate the particularity of things before us with unusual engagement and intensity. In other words, we appreciate specifics in a way that is rare in everyday life, where we tend to grasp things almost exclusively in terms of their relation to practical needs and purposes” (McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras & Brooks, 2004, p.45). An individual’s inherent need to experience the transcendental, imagined, poetic aspects of life are just as important, if not more so, than his or her practical needs (Abbs, 2003). With this in mind, it emphasizes the very real problem that, over the past few decades, the arts have been pushed into a marginalized place in the American education system, dismissed as an impractical break from serious learning (Siegesmund, 2002).
Art for School Reform

There is an ever-present tension outwardly stated by many artist teachers and researchers centering on the limiting pressures of a curriculum focused on performance objectives, criterion referenced testing and competency. Eisner (1985) argues that this is a fundamental problem with schooling in America:

Such a focus is, I believe, far too narrow and not in the best interests of students, teachers, or the society within which students live. Empathy, playfulness, surprise, ingenuity, curiosity, and individuality must count for something in schools that aim to contribute to a social democracy. (p.363)

In “What can Education Learn from the Arts about the Practice of Education?” (2002) Eisner presents a manifesto for arts education as a means of curriculum reform in America. He aims to reframe the conceptions shared about education, by examining history and conflicting attitudes towards the arts. As opposed to science, Eisner argues, the arts have been “a fall back position, a court of last resort, something you retreat to when there is no science to provide guidance” (Eisner, 2002, p.2). Eisner relates that, in the nineteenth century, education was guided by developments in psychology, and because of this, learning became viewed as something that could be measured quantitatively, and has since then followed this scientific rationalist framework. As part of the social efficiency movement reflected by the industrial age, and arguably now during the technological age, Eisner states that an industrial culture has developed in America’s schools, “one whose values are brittle and whose conception of what’s important narrow” (Eisner, 2002, p.3). The attraction to statistics, standards and order can give the illusion of comfort and stability while limiting the potential quality and depth of education, as the student
should never be considered as just a statistic. Persuasively written, Eisner’s work urges for a change in society’s values and perspectives.

In expressing the indispensable value of arts in education within the context of modern society, Gullatt’s study (2008) is helpful and revelatory in its presentation of statistics, which explains the problem of discrepancy between supporting research in the arts and their implementation in schools. Gullatt reveals that a large percentage of parents are satisfied with the current state of the arts and how they are taught in schools across America. When the public’s attitudes towards arts education show a general contentment and satisfaction, Gullatt argues that it is then difficult to appeal for change and ask for funds in areas where they do not appear necessary. Gullatt proceeds to point out the lack of movement in curriculum change, resulting from “a lack of desire by the public for their children to have exposure in school” (p.219). Consequently, the school boards then reflect this apathetic attitude towards the arts which is passed down to educators and ultimately students, furthering the stigma. He presents the problematic statistics: fifteen percent of American schools have no visual arts education, fifty-seven percent do not have dance education, twenty percent do not have drama education, and three percent do not have music education. This is troubling to Gullatt whose study, similarly to Eisner’s (2002), functions as a plea to parents, teachers and school leaders to recognize the importance and need for arts education and that this need should be appropriately emphasized to policy makers and education boards so that the proper support and availability can be provided.
Ontario’s Revised Arts Curriculum

Operating amongst all these tensions of an ideal vision of an arts education, the Ontario’s Art curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009) has undergone major revisions, seeking to shift its philosophy and intent to include a policy that “offers the potential for significant change in education of students by placing a greater emphasis on the Arts as a way of knowing and for making meaning” (Salo, 2009). The four central ideas underlying the Arts curriculum are to guide students in developing creativity, communication skills, understanding of culture, and ability to make connections. An important revision made to the document emphasizes the stages of the creative process as a means of encouraging critical thinking in students. The creative process includes a constructivist approach taken by the teacher working with the student to provide feedback throughout the following stages: challenging and inspiring, imagining and generating, planning and focusing, exploring and experimenting, producing, revising and refining, presenting, sharing, reflecting and evaluating. Another major revision to this curriculum document defines the three approaches that educators can take in their teaching, ideally achieving a balance between “learning in the arts, learning about the arts and learning through the arts” (Ontario Ministry of Education, p. 5). These various approaches outline the number of ways art can be practiced, appreciated and integrated in other subjects to encourage meaningful learning for students, which serves to inform teacher practice.

Along with describing the numerous benefits that an arts education offers through all its four strands, visual arts, music, dance and drama, this comprehensive curriculum document highlights the important roles and responsibilities of the teacher. As outlined, the need to have teachers guide students through the challenge that is the creative process requires “a considerable
expenditure of time and energy and a good deal of perseverance” (p.6). The document emphasizes the importance of professional development training for teachers and the involvement of artists and members of the arts community in classroom learning. The attitudes of everyone, including parents, teachers, and peers have the potential of drastically affecting how students approach the arts; hence, the recent surge of research exposing low self-efficacy beliefs in teachers all over the world poses a real problem due to its impact on student development.

Teacher Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy theory has substantial significance within the field of education. As founded by Albert Bandura, a prominent social psychologist, (1997) self-efficacy refers to one's “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (p.241). Garvis and Pendergast (2011), both researchers who have studied self-efficacy extensively in relation to teachers’ practices, expand on this theory to concern the teacher’s ability to promote desirable results of involvement and learning in students, even those who lack motivation. Garvis and Pendergast, (2011) who draw on Bandura’s theory in their research on teacher self-efficacy in the arts, explain that confidence, motivation and self-knowledge, which inform a teacher’s self-efficacy beliefs, are still developing during the teacher’s beginning years and are resistant to change once developed.

Numerous studies have emerged to report the serious problem of low self-efficacy in teachers providing visual arts instruction, especially with those in the early childhood education setting; most of these focus on the self-efficacy of pre-service teachers with regards to visual art instruction, leaving unanswered questions as to the potential for change in the self-efficacy of
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teachers later in their teaching careers (Alter, Hays, O’Hara, 2009; Davies, 2010; Garvis & Pendergast, 2010; Garvis, Twigg & Pendergast, 2011). There is a wide host of factors that affect teacher self-efficacy as explored by researchers, including the impact of school culture, resources, support and collective efficacy of teachers, quality of pre-service teacher education, professional development, past experiences, curriculum pressures and a perceived low status of the subject (Garvis & Pendergast, 2010, 2011; Davies, 2010; Gatt & Karppinen, 2014; Alter, Hays, O’Hara, 2009). For some, it is simply a lack of knowledge about the value and importance of learning in the arts that has teachers de-intellectualizing the subject, spurring the danger of a cyclical problem of failure for arts education (Garvis, Twigg & Pendergast, 2011).

In a recent study exploring children’s experiences of art in the classroom, researchers attributed a reported insecurity in primary school teachers, which lead to a shortfall in children’s educational experiences, thus discovering a lull in the development of expression in children’s drawings, and ultimately causing many children to give up on pursuing the arts at around the age of ten (Hallam, Des Hewitt, Buxton, 2014). With such a strong link between teacher self-efficacy and its effect on student learning and self-perception, it becomes increasingly important that teacher self-efficacy be well developed. Other studies found art appreciation experiences, where students have opportunities to perceive and critically draw meaning from artwork, to be non-existent in children’s interactions with visual arts education (Eckhoff, 2008; Duh, M., Zupancic, T. & Cagran, B, 2014). There is limited research exploring teacher self-efficacy and consequent student development in arts education experiences at the middle school level, when a substantial change appears to happen in children’s creative self-concepts (Hallam, Des Hewitt, Buxton, 2014; Paul, 2012). In defining one of the most important factors affecting teacher self-efficacy in arts education, Smithrim and Upitis (2002) point to the need for opportunities where teachers can
become intrinsically motivated by experiencing the transforming power of the arts in their own lives. These experiences would help them realize the potential intrinsic value of the arts, and support them in making changes in their professional lives and, consequently, in the lives of the students they teach.

**Summary and Implications for Further Study**

In examining instrumentalist to intrinsic claims validating a visual arts education, there are apparent tensions regarding its value and place in the institutional context of schools. By encapsulating all relevant beneficial arguments for an arts education, the Ontario Ministry’s revised Arts curriculum (2009) presents teachers with a list of guiding objectives by which to follow in their teaching. Situating the inherent complexity of the creative process within the contextual basis of schooling and curricula points to obvious limitations and existing pressures for educators, with regards to assessment attainments and time constraints in particular.

Operating amidst all of these tensions is a demonstrated poor self-efficacy in pre-service teachers in visual arts instruction gathered by recent research studies, influenced by a wide range of factors. My own study extends on this area of research, aiming to portray a more in-depth picture of how self-efficacy develops and impacts visual arts instruction as generalist teachers’ progress throughout their careers in the elementary level.
Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This qualitative study explored the self-efficacy beliefs of elementary generalist teachers when teaching visual arts in their classrooms. By interviewing teachers with minimal visual arts background before beginning their careers, this multiple case study aimed to identify how confidence, motivation and self-knowledge, all of which inform teachers’ self-efficacy belief systems, affected their practice and their ability to cope with any challenges presented to them (Garvis & Pendergast, 2010). Largely influenced by Ludema, Cooperrider and Barrett’s (2001) work highlighting the benefits of appreciative inquiry research, this study aimed to engage in positively framed dialogue with participants, stepping away from the path of traditional action research and “its romance with critique at the expense of appreciation” (p. 189). Following through with this aim, this study adopted a constructive lens in the hopes of inspiring passionate discourse and the renewed commitment of individuals involved. As inspired by these researchers’ appreciative framework, I hoped to avoid problem-focused modes of inquiry that ask deficit-based questions, lead to deficit-based conversations, and which in turn lead to deficit-based patterns of action. Instead, by asking “the unconditional positive question,” my study aimed to make deliberate affirmative assumptions, creating an atmosphere supportive of the strengths of individuals (Ludema, Cooperrider & Barrett, 2001, p.189).

Much research has shown the multiple benefits of a visual arts education, which Ontario’s Arts Curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009) reflects by bringing to light the creative and critical inquiry processes that may have been previously unclear to generalist teachers. However, in light of a recent outpouring of studies highlighting poor self-efficacy
towards visual arts teaching in pre-service and primary teachers in countries all over the world (as detailed in chapter one), it is imperative to consider any self-concept struggles that generalist teachers might face in the classroom at the elementary level. In America, art advocates have described existing tensions surrounding an education system that focuses too much on accountability measures in common core learning, and neglects the arts as a result (McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras, Brooks, 2004; Bobick & DiCindio, 2012; Siegesmund, 2002). In acknowledging these apparent pressures, the purpose of my study was to illuminate self-efficacy beliefs of generalist teachers in teaching visual arts, as they work with students in the critical developmental years spanning grades four to eight, a time when creative self-perceptions are prone to dwindle considerably (Paul, 2010; Hallam, Des Hewitt & Buxton, 2014).

Case Study Approach

In this research study, data collection occurred through individual face-to-face interviews with three elementary generalist teachers. In adopting a multiple case study approach, this research project focused on developing an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of particular phenomena in its ‘real life’ context’ (Simons, 2009, p.21). Simons, a researcher who specializes in the historical prominence and traditions of the case study approach within the fields of social sciences and education, documents the usefulness of this approach in exploring and understanding the dynamics of change, by recognizing the important process of co-constructing perceived reality through relationships with a case study’s participants. The case study approach is a preferred strategy “when “how” and “why” questions are being posed” (Yin, 1989 p.13). The primary purpose of this study was to generate
understanding about a specific topic; in this case, teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs in visual arts instruction, so as to inform their professional practice in a positive way (Simons, 2009).

As a collective case study, the opportunity was given to explore a number of case studies in order to form a collective understanding of the issue or question at hand (Simons, 2009). Inspired by Simons’ procedural directions on the case study approach, I conducted semi-structured interviews composed of open-ended questions in face-to-face meetings with individual teachers. This allowed documentation of each case’s particularity which was helpful in producing descriptive case studies with an in-depth understanding of the attitudes, beliefs and practices of teachers.

By following this interview-based approach, the respondent’s role was considered one of an “informant,” proposing his or her own insights into certain occurrences that the investigator can then use as a basis for further inquiry (Yin, 1989, p. 89). Data collection was taken in the form of purposeful, homogenous sampling, with the intent of gathering a comprehensive view of teachers’ perspectives. With this aim, I conducted focused face-to-face interviews with three teachers with various levels of teaching experience. Each respondent was interviewed for the short period of approximately one hour, serving a corroboratory purpose pertaining to certain facts that had already been established (Yin, 1989).

**Research Setting and Participants**

As noted above, this study focused on developing an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of “particular phenomena in its ‘real life’ context” (Simons, 2009, p. 21). The research setting included the school classrooms of the teacher
participants involved. Elementary generalist teachers without a visual arts specialist background prior to beginning their careers were selected to gain a broad perspective on their self-efficacy beliefs, including perceived strengths and personal challenges. In determining how years of experience influenced self-efficacy beliefs of teachers teaching visual arts, participants were in the mid to late stages of their teaching careers.

With the goal of understanding how visual arts instruction is handled at the junior/intermediate level, participants were teachers teaching grades four to eight students from various schools located in the Greater Toronto Area. By focusing on three established teachers with several years of teaching experience, this study benefited in gathering an understanding of how experience factors in to a teacher’s self-efficacy beliefs regarding their strengths, and their development of coping strategies with any existing challenges in teaching visual art.

Data Collection and Analysis

Alongside an appreciative lens (Ludema, Cooperider & Barrett, 2001), I have also been influenced in my thinking by the writings of Heron and Reason (2001), where they suggest that “good research is conducted with people rather than on people” (p.179). In being inspired by the idea of cooperative inquiry, I aimed to engage in reflective dialogue about arts-based practice with the participants. Particular to case study research is an orientation to be educative through an interactive social process (Simons, 2009).

Each interview with the participants took an estimated time of one hour. The transcription of the data began after the interview had finished. During the interview, I asked questions that pertained to the context of each of the educational settings to develop a descriptive
framework for organizing each case study and to claim assertions on themes and opinions gathered thereafter; according to Yin’s (1989) case study protocol, “a descriptive approach may help to identify the appropriate causal links to be analyzed” (p.108). In the interviews, a series of questions were asked according to the four topics of “Personal background,” “Classroom experiences,” “Resources, assessment and communication,” and “Teacher effectiveness” to determine teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs in teaching visual arts. The series of questions used are listed in Appendix A.

With regards to data analysis, Simons (2009) relates that qualitative case studies depend heavily on the interpretive skills of the researcher, who, through personal reflection and intuitive analysis, will tell the eventual story through the selected data. As a result, qualitative data analysis depends on an investigator’s style of rigorous thinking, sufficient presentation and consideration of alternative interpretations (Yin, 1989, p.105). Records of interviews were collected, read and reread in the process of transcribing the data, to garner teachers’ personal views and experiences on teaching art activities in the classroom. In analyzing the written transcripts, I looked for observable patterns in language and ideas, which then informed any correspondences between formed categories (Creswell, 2007). Important quotes and insights gained were highlighted and coded through the transcribing process of the interview data, and connections were made by relying on the theoretical propositions that led to the case study (Yin, 1989).

I was also influenced by the data coding techniques of Saldana (2008), who describes coding for patterns, where “the coder’s primary goals is to find receptive patterns of actions and consistencies in human affairs as documented in the data” (p.5). In the process of coding, Saldana refers to the researcher’s analytic lens, which is covered by coding filters that affect how
data is perceived and interpreted. By keeping the guiding lens of appreciative inquiry (Ludema, Cooperider & Barrett, 2001), my coding filter focused and aligned with my study’s overall aims, highlighting the participant’s strengths and informing any apparent deficit. In the cyclical act of coding, I began with making markings based on first impressions, followed by looking for “codable moments,” such as significant participant quotes or passages that were particularly striking, to work as preliminary codes (Saldana, 2008, p.16). Varying between in vivo, descriptive and process codes, I then copied these into a data table to show the transition to final categories. Following Yin’s cross-case synthesis, I used this analytic technique to display the data from the individual cases in a table, allowing for the development of naturalistic generalizations which could then be applied to other cases (Creswell, 2007).

As the researcher, I took observational field notes as well, in the aims of capturing mood and affective components of the interview and “reading between the lines” for any inferences and insights (Yin, 1989, p.63). These also helped in describing my own thoughts and feelings in reflecting on each conversation with the participant, while also identifying and alleviating potential bias that often attributes the investigator seeking “to substantiate a preconceived position” (Yin, 1989, p.65).

**Ethical Review Procedures**

In this study, the approved ethical review procedures for the Master of Teaching program were followed. Prior to data collection, participants were informed of the nature and purpose of the study, including how the data was to be used. Participants were given information about how the findings were to be used before the interview, addressing any privacy concerns. Participants
were also given a consent form, attached in Appendix B, to review and sign prior to the interview process. On this form, they were able to choose whether or not the participant wished for their anonymity and that of their respective institution, in which case pseudonyms were to be applied. A copy of this consent form remained with the participant in the case of any future concerns, and another remained with the researcher to keep in collected records for the length of the study.

Limitations

In conducting a qualitative case study in particular, there were numerous possible limitations that may have impeded the quality of this research. Tracy’s (2010) criteria-based guidelines for high quality qualitative research offered a useful pedagogical tool preventing misunderstanding and misevaluation of qualitative work. Contrasting with the qualitative research community that defines good research that relies on validity, generalizability, reliability and objectivity, Tracy offers a refined vision of the core values of this specific craft, including criteria marked by a worthy topic, rich rigour, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contributions, ethics and meaningful coherence. In considering the factor of rigour in this case study, there was limited time spent in the field to conduct data sampling which might have influenced my level of knowledge as a researcher in a given context. Roulston (2010) argues the inherent problems with using interviewing as a qualitative inquiry approach, which has had many researchers claiming it to be an insufficient means of data collection resulting in misinformation as it can potentially elicit false commentary or limited perceptions from the
interviewee. Rather, in demonstrating a typology for qualitative interviewing, Roulston urges the
necessity for the researcher to recognize underlying assumptions about knowledge production.

In the process of transcribing data, researchers have argued coding to be a
rigorous process, requiring much practice as the researcher becomes more attuned to “a
metacognition of method in an emergent, inductive-oriented, and social conscious
enterprise such as qualitative inquiry” (Saldana, 2008, p.41). As a novice researcher, the
validity of my analysis may have been limited in this respect. However, an effort to
ameliorate this limitation had been put into place by analyzing pilot interviews with two
other teachers beforehand.

Though generalizability is not the goal of qualitative research, my study was limited in
multivocality, resulting in a lack of credibility. Having multiple researchers working on this
study would have increased its reliability. Another limitation was presented by the multiple case
study approach, as Creswell (2007) highlights, that “the more cases an individual studies, the less
depth of a specific case” (p. 102). As the aim of a case study approach is to generate an in-depth
account of a particular case, the analysis of three distinct cases might have proven to be less
rigorous. In my study, the homogenous selection of research participants fitting the criteria of
mid-career teachers may also have been limiting in generating a meaningful and credible
conclusion on measuring self-efficacy based on years of experience.
Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

In this chapter, I will be presenting my findings as they lead me to answer my guiding research question, as stated in the beginning of my study. In aiming to understand how self-efficacy beliefs of elementary generalist teachers affect visual art education, I have interviewed three teachers from three different school boards across the Greater Toronto Area. All of these teachers have had extensive teaching experiences, as they are all in the mid-points of their careers. As I delve into each of these interviews and the statements made by my participants, I will be noting my findings according to the themes of Personal Background Experiences; Challenges; Strengths and Strategies; and Effectiveness. In discussing all of these themes consecutively, I have drawn out sub-categories to expand on their underlying complexity, as they relate to the challenges and strengths of teachers more thoroughly. As each theme is discussed, participants’ thoughts and contributions are referred to in quotation. This chapter is mainly focused on sharing what I have learned from each of my participants, in the aim of answering my research questions. The chapter will end in an overview of the findings. Though there will be overlaps between the fourth and fifth chapters, my final chapter aims to draw the contextual connections relating these findings to the thoughts and ideas of other researchers, as referenced in the literature review, in an effort to fill the aforementioned gap in the research and to ultimately answer my research question.
Participants

My first interview was with Maria, (whose name has been changed to a pseudonym for the purpose of ensuring anonymity). As a teacher working in a small elementary school in Brampton, the school is one with a culturally diverse student population of low to mid socio-economic status; in addition, it offers a French Immersion program for interested students. As an English homeroom teacher, Maria has been teaching for eleven years in the junior division. This year she is teaching a grade five and six split class, as opposed to last year when she was teaching a grade four class. By moving up a grade this year, she has many of the same students in her class, which she has gotten to know quite well. Bright and full of energy, Maria exudes happiness and pride in her work. She admitted that this is a challenging year for her, as this is her first experience in teaching the sixth grade. She mentioned also struggling with time management and with planning new, interesting, and differentiated learning activities for all of the students in her class, some of which work at a great variety of ability levels: “…It’s a little difficult. Sometimes, it feels like I’m juggling.” On top of these struggles, Maria spoke of the lack of parental involvement at her school, which added to the challenges of motivating student learning. Despite it being a more challenging year than others in the past, Maria enjoys teaching in the junior division, and strongly objected to a suggestion of teaching at the primary level when it was brought up in conversation. As a homeroom teacher she teaches all subjects, with the exception of music and French, so she is able to see the numerous strengths of her students in the different areas of learning. She also mentioned relying heavily on the support of her teacher colleagues. On numerous occasions during the course of our interview, Maria smiled as she referred to the supportive staff and accommodating administration at her school.
The second teacher interviewed was Catherine (operating under a pseudonym for this study), a French Immersion teacher in a highly populated school in the suburbs of Milton. Catherine spoke to the excitement of working at this new school, only in its second year, which reflects a highly progressive and technological focus in its design, as inspired by a vision for twenty-first century learning. The school also offers the French Immersion program, which houses a majority of the student population from a wide variety of culturally diverse backgrounds. As part of a new school, Catherine experiences the struggles of having a limited school budget. These struggles have recently been lessened, due to the high rise in student enrollment from the previous year. As a result of the unexpected surge in the volume of students, Catherine was one of many teachers whose classroom is in one of the school’s portables, which have been labeled as the school’s “cottages,” adding a fun and warm appeal to these additional building developments. Not quite as lovely as they might seem, due to needing regular maintenance and renovations, she related some of the struggles that the portable has given her throughout the year as interfering with her intentions of keeping up a semblance of a regular classroom. However, Catherine still carried an air of optimism, considering the bonus of having large windows in the portable that afford a great view of nature and the outdoors. A teacher of thirteen years, the bulk of her experience has been teaching in the junior grades. She has also had experience in the primary and intermediate grades. Catherine now teaches grades four and five to a homeroom and partner class, each comprised of approximately twenty five students. She organizes lessons in science, French language and visual arts in this program. Coming from a French background, Catherine attributed great value and pride to her role as a French teacher, but spoke to the struggles of having less time to teach the curriculum in the French Immersion program as it was very content-dense for students, who are learning subjects in an additional
language. Highlighting her strengths as a “very resourceful person”, she spoke often to drawing on the support of teachers around her as way of overcoming this pressure.

Chervin was the third participant interviewed as part of this research study. Located in a largely urbanized region of North York, her school was part of the Toronto Catholic District School Board, one of the larger boards in the GTA. Described as a progressive board, Chervin described “its intent to be the most transformative form of education,” involving a large focus on student accountability and technology-based learning. The student population in the school was primarily of low to mid socio-economic status, comprising of a large East Asian demographic of students. Graduating with a specialization in primary/junior education, Chervin quickly realized her love to teach students in the intermediate division, where she has since taught for fourteen years. When taking up a position at this school, Chervin described the implementation of an extensive rotary program for the intermediate students, which allowed more flexibility for teachers to teach to their strengths. Currently, she teaches religion, health and media to a homeroom grade eight class, as well as math, science, visual arts and physical education to a six/seven split class, on the rotary system. With a full and busy teaching schedule, Chervin handles this pressure well, highlighting the need for building student ownership at the intermediate level: “Our first focus, we call grade seven the buffer year for them, because we start introducing all the learning skills to have developed in order to be successful in high school, which then translates to post-secondary, which then translates into their careers.” She also related her enthusiasm in witnessing a shift over her teaching years in how students learn in the twenty-first century: “My fellow colleague and I, we know that information is a google-search away, so textbooks in our classroom are currently not the focus of what we use for information…they do a lot of learning collaboratively. We’ve taken this step away from being
the centre of the classroom, the class is now run basically by the students.” Chervin’s enthusiasm for this change in educational approach demonstrated her open-mindedness and flexibility in adapting to a new and progressive learning model in schools.

Personal Background Experiences

Alongside their extensive years of experience, teachers’ personal background experiences and exposure in visual arts were considered, as they had a great capacity to inform their self-efficacy. Teachers’ personal background experiences in visual arts have a great capacity to affect their recognition and appreciation of the value of art education in their students’ lives. As a result, participants’ education, personal experiences, art appreciation, and professional development were considered.

Education

Personal interest was a big factor for involvement in the arts during the education of my participants. With regards to receiving any visual arts education in previous years of schooling Maria, my first participant, explained that she had had not taken any courses and had no specialized background whatsoever in the arts. She spoke very honestly about her disinterest in taking any arts-related courses in high school, with the exception of a drama course that she took in her first year. In listening to her teacher education, I was surprised to learn that she had not received any arts education:
“Most of my time there was just in-class, a bunch of courses and the rest was all practicum, and then a quick course in the summer and that’s it. So sticking visual arts in there was...a little too chaotic.”

Completing her teacher education quickly in an out-of-province program, Maria seemed regretful about her lack of arts instruction, which also contributed to her lower degree of comfort in the classroom: “It’s just your comfort. I think that’s the problem with all this, like the arts and non-specialized teachers...it’s your comfort in it, too, right? If you’re not confident, then it’s going to shine through, right? And then thinking of ideas...it’s hard.” Without an introduction to arts education, Maria related how the unfamiliarity with teaching the arts can contribute to difficulties in finding resources to teach a challenging and stimulating visual arts program.

Much like Maria, Catherine had not had any interest in taking arts education coursework in her high school and postsecondary schooling. Over the length of our interview, she noted that in having focused on French studies in her education, the arts played a major role in the understanding of culture, and therefore she had had some exposure to their relevance:

“...Even though I didn’t take any specific art courses, I’ve a French background, so within my French courses in university, and when I did my Master’s as well, you do touch, because it’s such a big part of culture...so I do have some knowledge, but if you didn’t and that wasn’t your area, I think it would be really hard to teach.”

The subtle connection that Catherine made between culture and art is important in understanding the significant meaning of both in our lives. She recognized the value of art and culture, and this lent to a sense of familiarity and interest in the arts, in general. Although she had a half-year
course in visual arts in her teacher education, she admitted that this is not an adequate amount for teachers to be fully prepared.

In contrast, Chervin showed interest in visual arts and pursued limited coursework in high school and university:

“...I think I’ve always enjoyed art. But because I stopped, I just didn’t think I needed it. There came a point where it was just, do what you need to get by, and anything that I enjoyed was just set aside, and art was one of those things that I set aside, because it wasn’t something I was told could be used. They were wrong! They were wrong.”

In relating her school experiences, Chervin expressed feeling the pressure to drop visual arts courses in high school because of the negative bias towards their perceived non-utility in education and career prospects. However, in the few courses that she was able to take, she learned some technical knowledge in drawing, painting, sketching and colour theory that has helped her in teaching her visual arts program in her classroom today. She expanded on the important value of arts education in her teacher education program: “...There was one course that focused on how to teach art, which I thought was very valuable, because it’s one thing to like it, but the need to be able to explain how to teach it is different. And I didn’t realize that until I took the course.” Although Chervin shared that she has always had a passion for the arts, she made the important distinction that this is not enough; to learn to teach art has been a necessity for her to be able to scaffold students’ learning appropriately.
Personal Experiences

My participants stated an inherent joy and pride in making art during their childhood years. In relating their childhood engagement in art, my participants spoke of fond memories of working on art or craft projects. Though feeling indifferent in practicing visual arts as an adult in her personal time, Maria spoke of feelings of enjoyment in art, painting and making crafts as a child. Her emotional response was similar to Catherine’s, who expressed feelings of pride during her own childhood: “I can remember, like in my intermediate art years, just feeling a lot of pride in what I could do…and I see what students can do and the pride that they take in their art, and it’s another area for them to shine whereas they might not feel as comfortable in other subject areas.” She revealed a desire to foster students’ emotional responses in their art-making, and showed a degree of weariness towards causing harm to their self-perceptions. In relating to her own childhood, she briefly mentioned a harrowing experience concerning a negative comment made on her own report card. It strongly impacted her self-esteem in visual arts at that time in her life, and has served as a learning experience which fosters a stronger empathetic connection with her students today.

Catherine’s mother, who is an artist working in fibre arts, has also impacted her understanding of the many forms that art can take, fostering an open-minded approach in the classroom: “My mom is very artistic, some people might say she is more from a craft background, although I disagree, I think a lot of what she does is arts, not crafts…” Although I had assumed my participants would be limited in their understandings of art, I was surprised to find that all showed a critical awareness for its varied representation and form, especially in the distinction between an art and a craft, and treating these as two separate things. Chervin also showed an understanding of this key difference, relating her love of scrapbooking as a beloved
form of crafting in her day-to-day life. When asked if she believed her personal experiences in the arts have affected her confidence, she attributed her personal experiences in grounding her passion:

“…I’ve been on a journey, a personal journey to focus on what I love. Because that makes everything worth it. So art is one of them. Dancing is the other…

I’m driven by what I enjoy doing. So that’s part of it!”

Though discouraged by an inherent bias towards the arts, Chervin expressed being guided by intrinsic motivation and finding happiness in her pursuits related to her passion, which she infused in her teaching.

Art Appreciation

In relating experiences of visiting art galleries or exhibits, there was a mixture of responses. Although Maria appreciated artists and their work, she could not afford the time to visit art galleries: “based on time and life and family, it gets too crazy.” Her disengagement with the works of artists translates in the way in which she teaches visual arts in her classroom; there was no mention of artist studies in her visual arts program, however there were many references to cross-disciplinary connections, suggesting that this was her preferred approach. She expressed with great enthusiasm, past trips to art centres with her classes and making Egyptian canopic jars, a direct connection to the social studies curriculum; this was an invaluable experience she could not have provided for students in her regular program.

On the other hand, Catherine expressed great familiarity with artist studies and mentioned working with Escher art and Georgia O’Keefe paintings during our interview. Her
knowledge and willingness to incorporate artist references is attributed by museum visits and art gallery tours, often done during her travels with her family:

“When I travel, I definitely visit. We do the museum tours and that kind of stuff… I also do those sorts of things with my own children, so when we’ll travel, we’ll look at art. There’s also a sculpture park near where I live, so we visit that.”

By inviting those art appreciation experiences into her personal life, she then found it easy to make connections to artist’s works during her lessons: “Usually, if I was just to say, planning ahead, I would look at my six week block, and I would tie it into whatever I’m doing, and then I would either look into an artist that can help support.” As well, Catherine expressed her willingness to expose her students to new experiences by inviting local artists into her class, as she had several times in the past, and in taking her students to art programming in the city.

Although having expressed a passion for visual arts, it surprised me to learn that Chervin did not visit art galleries in her personal time, attributing the reason to a busy schedule. She also made a startling statement on why she refrains from taking her intermediate classes for experiences of art appreciation:

“I’ve always wanted to take a class to the art gallery, and help them appreciate art, but I find that, for them, the students at this age, they’re not ready for it. I know I shouldn’t make that assumption, but… I can see they’re not connected to that kind of art… I know I try my best to expose them to art from the past, but… because they have it available to them on a screen, on a sheet of paper, for them to see it live, it makes no difference. They’re not connected that way and they don’t see the value in that, because their attention is too limited…”
As Chervin explained her reasoning to my doubtful ears, I found myself acknowledging a degree of truth to her intuitive observations. In suggesting that the type of art often found generically in canvas form in art galleries might appear to be outdated in the technological age in which we live, she made a valuable assertion that artists should aim to reflect or appeal to the culture and times within which we work and live. Chevrin’s comment operated on a current snapshot of society, regarding the superfluous amount of technology that students are exposed to these days, through the various forms of popular media; all of which have the ability to desensitize the growing child and overstimulate the brain, rendering visits to an art gallery as mundane and tedious. Her statement reflected the cultural age within which Western society now resides, and it intensified a sense of undeniable neglect which works to highlight the negative bias towards the arts, in general. We came to a very uncomfortable moment in our interview when we wondered what the fate of art galleries might be, if we were to give up on their value in our lives. Although Chervin was weary about introducing her students to the art gallery setting, she did however highlight the need for exposing students to artists and their works in her lessons as a means of instilling an appreciation for students until they were able to one day manage a visit themselves.

Professional Development

Opportunities for professional development related to the arts, as expressed by my participants, were noted to be slim. Catherine emphasized the fact that many opportunities for professional development were related to the core subject areas, which were often given more priority:
“They tend to give more of a focus on that, I find, and a push even within the school system and PD opportunities. While there are some for the arts, the bulk of what is offered has to do with literacy and numeracy, and then you have some for the other areas as well, but I’d say probably less for the arts, from what I’ve seen in my experience.”

Not having taken any professional development courses, Catherine’s background was akin to Maria’s, who also had not been involved in any additional professional development. Both participants, however, shared a desire for more opportunities to be offered, which also presented itself as a challenge. Though professional development opportunities were offered to some degree, however limited, both teachers seemed to quickly relate to their own resourcefulness in collecting resources or relying on teacher colleagues for support, pointing to a potential disinterest in these opportunities. It was interesting to see that Chervin, who had explained the necessity of having arts education in her teacher preparation program, was one to have sought out further opportunities for professional development early on in her career, taking all of the available additional qualifications courses in visual arts.

**Challenges**

In this study, I was able to learn more about the self-efficacy of teachers based on the types of challenges they referred to having experienced. As teachers in their mid-careers, all participants were still experiencing many challenges inhibiting visual arts instruction. Some of which were self-imposed challenges, based on feelings of low self-efficacy stemming from
inexperience, others were outwardly imposed and outside of the teachers’ control, such as time limitations, school materials and budget.

*Time Limitations*

One of the major challenges working against teachers in teaching visual arts was a limit of time. All teachers spoke to their content-dense teaching schedules, which often left little time for visual arts instruction. Maria was one teacher who often referenced this struggle in our interview. In teaching a split grade five/six class, she highlighted the struggles of having to “keep it fresh all the time” and invent new lessons for students whom she had taught in previous grades. Planning effective and engaging visual arts lessons was a time-consuming process, which left Maria, at times, planning only one visual arts lesson per month:

“Honestly, we’re supposed to do it at least once a week, the arts, and it’s rarely that I’ll get it done in the two weeks or the three weeks, when it’s actually focusing on an element of design…It’s very rare, unfortunately. Because sometimes, that’s the section that gets kind of, pulled away…”

The demanding schedule that teachers have to meet often left visual arts instruction as a rarity. In an apologetic tone, Maria explained, “It’s too hard, it’s too hard with all the other expectations that you have to meet…it’s really hard.” She spoke very honestly about not lending the same time and devotion to teaching visual arts as she might have given to other subject areas, which was also determined by the priority given by school boards indicating the amount of time teachers were supposed to teach specific subjects.

Similarly, Catherine, who taught the French Immersion program, expressed feeling stressed by the “less time” she had in teaching the different content areas, due to the program’s
condensed nature. Curiously, however, both teachers were in agreement about the adequate time that was allotted currently to visual arts instruction in their classrooms. Catherine, who would normally spend a hundred minute block a week on a visual arts lesson, which might sometimes be carried over into the second or third week, depending on the length and complexity of the project, believed that the time she lent to the visual arts was adequate. Maria, too, who was uncertain about the time she might spend in visual arts instruction during a week stated, with hesitation, that she believed that the time was also adequate: “…I’d say it’s fair…when I do do art, I try to make it as interesting as possible…but again, I don’t devote as much time, like I would to other units.” By agreeing with the present circumstances in regards to the allotted time frame for the visual arts, it suggested that participants had come to a passive acceptance of the lesser value attributed to the arts. In speaking of a recent lesson she taught in the past, Maria explained that she strived for continuity in a visual arts lesson, and related this reason as to why she did not teach art often, over her preference for a longer block of time:

“That project took time, right? Like it took a couple of periods, where instead of doing, you know, forty minutes that week and then waiting until next week to finish it, what I’ll do is, I’ll take a whole afternoon, whenever I decide to do art, and I’ll try to get as much done as I can. I won’t break it up…And because I don’t do it often, the kids get excited when I do do it! Yay, a whole afternoon of art!”

In opting to teach visual arts in fewer blocks, over longer periods of time, visual arts instruction seemed to be shadowed by a degree of anomaly for students, which Maria related, might cause some students to grow tired and overwhelmed by the intensity of the art-making in a single day.
Because time was such a desired commodity, teachers had no choice but to allow visual arts instruction to be considered a deviation from the standard norm of the classroom routine.

On the other hand, the rotary system operating at the intermediate level in the school where Chervin works, ensured that visual arts instruction was more of a regular occurrence for students. Despite this fact, the students were asked to take their artwork home and work on it there because of the time limitations in-class:

“They have to! They have to, because we’re involved in such an extensive rotary, our time is to the minute and, it’s sad to say, we don’t have the time in class, because there’s so much else that we have to cover. And plus, some students can’t focus and get creative, so they’ll need to be in their own element to get their ideas down. They can do that at home.”

In understanding the extensive time required in working through the creative process with students, Chervin relayed that she would teach the foundational aspects of an art project in class, and then ask students to take it home, where they would then be given the opportunity of conferencing online on the class’s website with the teacher, also:

“They know when I’m available online. And they know because of my personal life, that they can’t expect to see a response from me, especially if it’s a direct message, from this time to that time, because that’s my time with the family. After my down time, then they can expect it.”

The limited time in class had Chervin relying on students’ accountability to conference with her outside of the class, pointing to her devotion to the subject area and to the students. She admitted that she had no choice but to use this approach, which took time away from her personal life, but it was time she felt was necessary for helping her students. As a result, the sacrifice that she
made for this subject area had the potential of impacting students’ perceptions towards the significant weight and crucial importance of the visual arts as a discipline.

Ideas

Though some participants explained being more resourceful and creative in coming up with ideas than others, the search to find resources that the participant was comfortable with, as well as working to meet the needs of all students, proved to be a major challenge. Maria related to this problem especially in her split grade class, where she explained she had many of the same students in her class from previous years, and which also comprised of a wide variety of students with different achievement levels:

“I’m always having to find new things, even though I thought my lessons last year were really good and successful… It’s really hard for me to find an activity that will make everybody happy…”

As a generalist teacher with no specialization or background in an arts education, Maria expressed the challenges of having to look for new and engaging visual arts lessons for her students that will also match her ability and comfort level:

“To try to find something to match what I’m comfortable with is hard… I wouldn’t find something that’s too, too hard. If I couldn’t do it, I wouldn’t definitely show the kids how to do it. Because it would be a total disaster… You don’t want to show them that you don’t know how to do it either, right? So, I might not unfortunately challenge them as much, because I’ll find things that I’m comfortable with, that I would be able to teach them. So it’s unfortunate that sometimes, for some kids that need to be more challenged and
are really good at it, I might not challenge them the way they need to be challenged, because I’m not comfortable in it, and that’s where it’s a downfall.”

It surprised me that Maria would bring up these reflections in our interview with such regret. This was one of the more profound moments in our interview where Maria drew attention to her feelings of self-efficacy, which, despite her years of teaching, had left her feeling limited in her visual arts instruction abilities. She felt a great responsibility to her students to provide more of an educationally stimulating challenge through her teaching.

When Maria looked to the internet for materials, she found that a majority of them were at the primary level as opposed to the junior level within which she teaches. She explained that she struggled with the challenge of finding “a really cool and fun lesson” to show her students that met their interests and their ability levels. Although she wished she could go to other intermediate teachers for support, she worried that she might jeopardize their plans when her students finally reached these grades. Maria explained that teaching visual arts at the junior level was much more difficult than teaching at the primary level and drew out the differences as such:

“It’s not like primary, where you teach the elements of design, showing the different types of lines, and then could do a quick, little activity on that. You have to engage them more, get them interested. I can’t just give them a sheet of paper and say, let’s practice the types of broken lines or different kinds of shading, or mixing colours…it’s not like that, it’s not that easy. I can’t give that to my grade five’s and six’s, they’re going to think I’m a joke! That’s why it’s difficult in the older grades, I can imagine, like in grades seven and eight,
because you have to challenge them, because they would already know the basics, you would hope!”

Maria’s observations surprised me. I realized that she placed a lot of pressure on herself to create engaging lessons for her students, so that they would be challenged as well as inspired by her projects. Her feelings of discomfort, stemming from her often referred to “lack of expertise” and technical knowledge in teaching visual arts, coupled with the pressures of meeting her students’ needs and interests, proved to make the development of visual arts lessons that she was happy with a challenge for her.

Following a student-centred model of teaching, Chervin’s teaching of visual arts at the intermediate level stood in stark contrast to Maria’s example. As a teacher with some technical knowledge and interest in visual arts, she explained that she came up with creative ideas on her own, often based on the interests of her students. She explained that she would often pitch ideas to students and that their responses would give her an indication of whether an idea was worth pursuing or not:

“I get my ideas from random thoughts. There was a tattoo idea that I had a few years ago, because they were looking at a new novel, and in my head, I thought, wouldn’t it be cool if I could teach tattoo art and understanding tattoo’s stigma? The curriculum expectations state that you should be able to bring in a cultural aspect or a historical aspect so we learned about the history of it, and different perspectives based in history, and it worked! It worked successfully. I’ll draw on whatever is relevant and happening in their lives.”

Both Chervin and Catherine, who have had some exposure to visual arts over the course of their education or personal upbringings, spoke to the lessened stress of finding resources. Both
participants explained that the revised Ontario’s Arts Curriculum functioned as a helpful guide and starting point for the teachers. Chervin referred to its liberating qualities: “There’s a freedom in it. There’s an absolute freedom in it.” Their positive commentary stood in contrast to Maria’s, who used it as a starting point, however saw it as limiting in its presentation of information:

“When it actually comes to the expectations, it just briefly gives a small summary of statements of what needs to be covered in that grade, but it doesn’t say how you should teach it or what activities you could do. Because that doesn’t really open anything up. Art should be based on the interests of your kids, and their own creativity…so it’s like any curriculum guide, you have to find your resources and…pick out what’s most significant.”

Although the Ontario Arts Curriculum presented itself as a starting point, all teachers spoke to the need for departure from the curriculum in planning visual arts lessons based on the interests of the students in their classes. This necessary departure offered more difficulty to some participants less comfortable in their visual arts instruction and needing more guidance to form relevant connections between the curriculum, and their own ideas and resources.

Materials

The challenge of finding materials was one that all teachers have expressed having struggled with. Teaching a successful visual arts program, Catherine stated, involved the need for teachers to be highly resourceful, as materials could often be scarce. Depending on the socio-economic area of the individual school, and whether the school’s focus may be in supporting the arts or not, these factors and more stood to affect the budget allotted to teachers for purchasing supplies for their classrooms. Both Catherine and Chervin, who had felt more
comfortable in finding ideas for their lessons, expressed more of a struggle in obtaining the appropriate materials for the lessons they wished to carry out. Chervin, who worked at a school in a low to mid socioeconomic area, explained that she would often have to turn to buying materials for students to use in their art projects:

“We can only use what we have, so printing out those pictures? That came out of my pocket. You have to also understand the neighbourhood, right? We’re not… the students are low to mid eco-status at home… So it’s the resources, we can only use what we have, and that’s my struggle. That limits what we do.”

In a similar way, Maria expressed the “concern in finding the materials and even using your own budget to get these things.” This worked as a major hindrance in carrying out any fun and engaging projects that she might have, and she often relied on visits outside to art centres as opportunities for students to work with materials they might not otherwise get an opportunity to use, such as working with clay or wire. Although Maria said that the school’s administration is willing to offer a budget for specialized artist visits or field trips to art centres for teachers and their classes, there are other schools where such opportunities were not so readily available.

In terms of exposing students by affording artist visits in the school where she now worked, Catherine explained how the school focus often dictated whether or not these opportunities arose: “We haven’t done anything like that in this school. It’s not really where the school focus is, at this time.” When trying to offer a more exciting and engaging visual arts program, teachers often felt hindered by their limited school budgets.
**Student Creativity**

Guiding students through the creative process in hopes of inspiring original thought and creativity was also a major struggle for all of the teachers. One of the most challenging tasks of the visual arts teacher was in building student confidence and helping students feel proud of their efforts, and this was discussed by each of the participants. Each teacher related their efforts in working with their students’ uncertainties in their creative abilities. Some teachers struggled more than others in guiding students and scaffolding their learning. When telling me about a recent visual arts lesson she taught on drawing a house, Maria explained a very guided, step-by-step approach including showing her students a video lesson which she had found online. After practicing once, she then gave them the opportunity be creative with their own drawings:

“When they actually had to apply their ideas on their own and couldn’t just look at a picture and copy it stage by stage, they had a hard time…the downfall with showing an example is that they try to copy that and not use their own creativity…so sometimes, when I’ll show an example, I’ll show it quickly, but then take it off the board…because I find that if I keep it up, some of the kids who don’t want to think of their own ideas, they’ll keep going up and looking at the art that’s been previously done from another student’s example, and just duplicate it…because those are the things I would do as a kid, I would just try to copy right off the board, because I was lazy…”

I was startled by Maria’s reference to her own struggles with motivation in art-making as a student, which connected to the struggles she now witnessed in her own students. In the hopes of combatting the apathy she realized in herself as a child, she attempted to reinvigorate her students’ own inspirations in visual arts. However, Maria struggled in offering meaningful
feedback to students, not being able to use the technical knowledge that a trained visual arts
teacher might have, including “all the different ideas that they can engage kids in different ways”
as they worked beyond a creative obstacle.

Likewise, Catherine expressed a similar struggle as Maria in motivating students’
creativity and resorted to a similar strategy:

“I’ve moved away from doing a teacher-sample with my students. I used to
always do a teacher sample in visual arts, and I don’t anymore because I find
that what students would often do is try and model or do exactly what I’ve
done, and that’s not what I want them to do.”

As students move into the realm of visual arts, their mindset is still very much immersed in the
ways of thinking that other subjects might demand, including the necessity of a single, correct
answer. Chervin spoke to the inherent problem solving skills that her intermediate students often
struggled with when they entered her class in September:

“They come in very closed…because of the cookie-cutter art they’ve been
asked to do all of these years, right? I start in September. I would pay more
attention to them, I have to admit it, I would. In a sense of maybe they need
ideas, because they’re too busy looking at other people’s work, but I’d give
them the ideas, like try this, try this try this…and they’ll come to a point where
they’ll be like, Oh I like this! They did it, it’s just they didn’t know how to get
there…That’s part of the build-up, they’re not allowed to ask me if it’s good.
Because I’ll tell them, I warn them, I’m going to throw that question right back
at you! Is that good enough for you? Are you okay with it? It’s not me, it’s are
you okay with it? It’s your effort, it’s your art, it’s your work. How do you feel about it?”

Chervin’s need to make her visual arts program personal to her students had her reminding her students often to approach her with thoughtful questions relating to the success criteria she established with them for their projects. She assured me, however, that each year, the struggle was the same, as the students always came to her confined by their ideas of “whether they’re good in art or not.” As opposed to providing students with one right way of creating and presenting their artwork, she offered her students multiple ideas in carrying out their personal visions for their projects, motivating her students along the way, causing each artwork to look very different from the next.

**Strengths and Strategies**

The more willing teachers were in discussing their strengths and strategies, the more apparent their high self-efficacy became in their visual arts instruction. All in their mid-careers, my participants had much to relay about strategies put into place to cope with struggles in their visual arts instruction, including a flexibility and willingness to make cross-curricular links, incorporate student interest, experiment with technology, draw from a wide range of resources and teacher networks, and turn previously considered challenges such as assessment into valued support.
Cross-Curricular Integration

In coping with the major struggle that each of the teacher participants expressed relating to limited time in visual arts instruction, all of them mentioned relying on cross-curricular integration as a beneficial strategy. Catherine, who teaches the rigorous French Immersion program, explained that she preferred the integrated approach when doing all of her teaching, especially in the visual arts. The connections in such activities were more obvious and straightforward to her because of the familiarity she felt with the curriculum and its expectations. However, at an earlier point in her career, she related that she would have preferred the stand-alone approach in teaching visual arts:

“To have an integrated approach would have been more challenging earlier in my career, because everything is new coming at you and you’re trying to figure it all out... And then, you have all the newest initiatives that you’re trying to implement as well. But, over the years, once you’ve taught a subject once or twice, or a grade once or twice, then it definitely makes it easy for an integrated approach.”

Relying these days mostly on this favourable integrated approach, Catherine explained that her strategy was to lay out a six to eight week template planner, input all of her subjects and finally use this as a guide to make relevant connections where she saw fit. Though the planning process was intensive and required much research in advance, she claimed that it was an effective approach in ensuring that all the different subject expectations were taught: “It is a timesaver, yes, and it’s just more realistic for the students. It just ties everything together and when you weave it through together like that, it’s just a better way for students to learn.” Her remark was critical in drawing attention to the seamless, interconnected way that students interact with the
real world around them, where they often see no distinction between the different subject areas and then are less likely to favour one subject over another.

Catherine attributed its value to its appeal as a differentiated learning approach for students, one which Maria also found value with in her teaching. In relating a lesson she taught that incorporated visual arts into a social studies lesson, she raved about the positive effects that it had on students’ learning:

“I think it’s important because they get to learn it in a different way. They get hands-on, and that makes a huge difference. Where they get to build a castle in Medieval times…it makes a huge difference when they actually get to build it, because they’ll actually remember why they cut it out, instead of reading about it in a textbook…When they build it, they put their own ideas into their work and realize, oh! I forgot the slit, that little crack in the wall so that they can stick their bow and arrow through…That, that they’re going to remember.”

Both Catherine and Maria, who had less technical knowledge and specialization in supporting their visual arts programs, expressed their ease in drawing connections between subject areas. Maria expressed having no preference in choosing to teach following either approach. Their enthusiasm for the integrated approach was very apparent as they mentioned cross-disciplinary links often found between visual arts and other subjects such as literacy, math, and social studies. Chervin, who also stated a lack of preference for either the stand-alone or integrated approach, related that her choice would often depend on what it is being taught. Over the years, she had found it easier to teach using the integrated approach, much like Catherine: “Often, whatever comes my way, whatever I can conjure up in a sense, it just happens…Whatever’s relevant with the trends and the fads, also.” Chervin seemed relaxed and comfortable about her
approach to teaching visual arts, explaining that she would not do the same things in sequential years, but allowed her program to adapt with the current times that the students are living in. She stressed the important distinction that, “essentially, the fundamentals still need to be taught.” I was glad for Chervin’s distinction between teaching using the stand-alone and integrated approaches, noting the necessity of teaching the fundamentals of art, which might get overlooked if visual arts were strictly integrated with other subject areas. As a result of her acquired knowledge and passion in teaching the visual arts, Chervin saw the necessary intrinsic value in teaching visual arts as a subject in its own right, despite the struggle that teachers might have in planning it within their schedules.

*Resources and Technology*

An important finding in this research has been that all of my participants expressed a strong reliance on technology as an invaluable resource in their teaching of visual arts. Maria, who had the least knowledge about the visual arts with regards to her background, mentioned that she would often search online for resources, especially using the popular Pinterest website. She described the recent positive response she had in teaching a visual arts lesson that required a degree of technical knowledge:

“I showed them a step-by-step video on the Smartboard, by pausing and playing of how to draw a house and make it look as realistic as possible. So what they did was they followed, showing how to draw lines and make it look 3D. Based on what they learned from that, I gave them a whole new piece of paper and they had to create a design based on what they learned from that, and their own creativity…and the kids were surprised and really enjoyed it.”
Rather than feeling limited by her lack of technical knowledge, Maria was empowered by the technology and had become a learner alongside her students. She expressed feeling more at ease in providing students with opportunities to learn the technical skills through her presentation of these videos, which might not have been possible earlier in her career. Her appreciation in having a Smartboard as a large, interactive computer for her students to engage with in the classroom, has helped her to significantly improve the quality of her lessons: “It was the technology in the classroom that allowed me to do that, right? Instead of me standing up at the board, the kids were more engaged when they saw it on the computer. Even if I were to show them the exact same thing, their interest is not the same…it’s not.” Maria’s reliance on technology as a resource was one of the many ways that she overcomes her challenges in offering a strong visual arts program in her classroom. She explained that this strategy also saved a lot of time, because instead of going to a computer lab, she was lucky enough to be able to show the students a video immediately and in one sitting. This extended on the continuity she explained that she valued in her visual arts teaching.

Much like Maria, Catherine also used technology as a powerful platform for teaching her lessons in visual arts. In terms of gathering resources, she explained that she also used museum and gallery websites as tools and additional aids in composing her lessons. Catherine also related to the benefits of having a technological tool in her classroom: “We’ll do a powerpoint showing the next steps or we might look at a final piece and problem-solve on how you would actually get to this point. And they would have to work through and do some problem solving as artists.” Catherine explained here that she would vary her approach sometimes to be less guided and more exploratory, pointing to the need for students to be able to problem-solve and brainstorm
independently, such as in figuring out how to achieve certain technical effects that artists might employ in their works.

Attributing immeasurable value to technology in her teaching of visual arts, Chervin explained that the addition of a multimedia focus to the revised Arts Curriculum allowed her more creativity in her lesson planning: “The difference between the old curriculum and the new one, is that we get to include a multimedia focus into it, or current media technologies, so that makes it even better for us, because we’re now bringing the technology into use in the classroom.” With the new addition of iPads and laptops in the intermediate classes of her school, Chervin described new-found, exciting possibilities for students to explore photography and animation in art, opening their eyes to different media forms while working through the creative process.

Teacher Support

Turning to a support system of colleagues was a shared strategy used by the participants with minimal visual arts background in this research and proved to be most effective in increasing comfort and knowledge in the subject area. Maria often referenced teacher support as her main coping strategy in helping her teach more effectively in visual arts:

“There’s some teachers in the school who I’ll go to, because either they’ve done art in university or they’ve taken courses…or they’ll just appreciate it a lot more, and they just have a lot of ideas…The teacher I’m working with now, I think took art in university. She has a lot of good ideas, so I’ve been relying a lot on her. Like I’ll ask her, do you mind, if I steal some of your stuff? And she doesn’t mind at all, she knows the boat I’m in.”
Relying on other teacher support was common to Catherine’s strategic approach also. She explained that support from colleagues had been most helpful to her over the years, and attributed this to the qualities of a successful visual arts teacher: “…Knowing who to go to for help and seeking out support, too, whether it’s from a colleague or if it’s somebody else you know, just to broaden your own horizons and deepen your own understanding.” A willingness to reach out to other teachers who have incorporated strong visual arts programming was one of the most effective approaches taken by these teachers, and demonstrated their eagerness and effort to grow and continue to develop their practice into the future.

Assessment

Although I had initially envisioned assessment to be a struggle for teachers in their visual arts instruction, I was shocked by the positive ways in which teachers used it to guide their practice. All teachers referred to adapting to self-assessment as a means of encouraging student self-reflection on their efforts and to increase motivation. Maria explained that she would often ask her students the self-reflecting question: “What do you expect me to give you on this work? You tell me what you would give yourself.” In her assessment, Maria stated:

“I’m pretty comfortable. I think I’m pretty fair, too…I don’t always think it’s going to be the most perfect thing. A lot of my marking is based on the whole process, not just the overall outcome. A lot of it is the observational process of how they got there…are they trying their best? Are they working hard? Are they giving up?”
Maria made an important assertion as she described relying on both the process and the product in her evaluation of students’ learning in visual arts. She also described using assessment to help in her struggles of working with unconfident or unmotivated students in her classroom:

“I have a lot of kids who say, I’m not good at art, or I suck… I just keep telling them, if you say you’re going to suck, you’re going to suck, right? Because you’re just giving up. But they have to try and do it, because it’s part of the curriculum, so you have to encourage them as much as possible. In the end, you need a mark for visual arts.”

Maria’s approach to assessment was more one-sided and arbitrarily decided, as she described the heavy hand she takes in assigning marks to her students. Her tone in discussing assessment also suggested that there was a degree of burden felt in assessment that the other teachers did not identify with.

Maria’s teacher-directed approach was contrasted with Chervin’s student-centred one in the intermediate classroom. Chevrin described working with students in outlining specific success criteria for their projects, which then resulted in ongoing feedback focused on these set benchmarks. Similar to Maria, she explained her comfort in assessment and placing value on the process also:

“With the introduction of the success criteria over the course of the last few years, it clearly defines what the students deserve according to marks. Like the evaluation aspect of it, that’s the ongoing thing where we’re constantly talking about art, and how to get them to improve and what they’re comfortable doing for their final product.”
Moving away from a teacher-centred approach, Chervin laid much emphasis on student accountability in approaching her with questions and receiving feedback with regards to their art. She explained that because in art, the process is personal, therefore the assessment should only serve to guide students to better expressing their vision through their artwork. Chervin also explains that a gallery walk would often follow students’ final products, allowing for critique based in the success criteria and further self-reflection as they developed their individual artist statements.

Similar to Chervin, Catherine offered her students the opportunity for artist reflections. In a confident manner, she described how formulaic assessment has become in her classroom:

“Student assessment is always based on the success criteria that was built with the students. So they would know ahead of time and it’s something we co-create together. Usually for art, I do a check-bric, which means they’ve met the criteria or they haven’t met it. I don’t do a rubric like a one, two, three, four level…we’ve kind of moved past that.”

Catherine’s reliance on a “check-bric” standard of assessment has me wishing I had asked her about the reasons and appeal for this approach, and whether the student completes one themselves as a form of self-assessment. Sectioning students’ work into two categories, the check-bric is form of assessment that seems to be empowering to more students. It also seems that the check-bric as a general form of assessment could be more considerate to the students’ unique qualities in their artwork that prevent it from being compared to another student’s. Ultimately, it seemed that all teachers were comfortable to some degree in their assessment of students’ artwork, using it as a tool for motivating students’ personal expression in their visual arts classes.
Reflective Practitioner

There were many instances where repeated ideas and personal insights shared by my participants inspired my realization that the qualities of a reflective practitioner was a very desirable strength honed by these teachers in their visual arts instruction. This developed openness to reflecting on one’s own practice has undeniably affected these teachers’ self-perceptions regarding their effectiveness as educators. It is the teacher, as a reflective practitioner, who is able to notice the subtleties in students’ learning and draw ideas for possible adaptations in their own practices. Often, these instances involved the teacher situating themselves as a learner in their own classroom, growing alongside the students as they are teaching.

One of the ways that teachers are reflective about their practice is in their classroom management. A challenge previously undiscussed in the last theme was the struggle that teachers related to dealing with student misbehaviour and a disruptive class environment in their visual arts classrooms. Maria explained the stresses that might prevent her from teaching a visual arts lesson: “I have to say I do get stressed with art, because it’s… not that I don’t have patience, but sometimes it gets so out of control in your room! The mess, the noise! It is stressful for the teacher.” One way that Catherine reflected on her practice and adapted to her class of students was by implementing a steady and standard routine. She explained her choices for providing students with more complex projects like paper mache or sculpture: “I usually leave those complex types of projects until the end of the year, when the kids really have that routine established in the class, and I know that they’re not going to make silly choices by flicking the paper mache paste on somebody else in the class.” Another strategy Catherine used, alongside
establishing an art class routine, was setting the tone for the classroom atmosphere by playing music or soundtracks for students as they worked. She explained that they then become immersed in their artwork, while following the rhythm of the music.

In making art personal to students in the intermediate classroom, Chervin related that she had worked hard at adapting her practice to help students abandon their preconceived notions about whether they were “good in art.” She explained that because students have been so focused on the technical aspects of art-making by creating cookie-cutter art in past years, she will often have to work to establishing an open environment in the classroom:

“The first lesson in September, the very first lesson, in both grades seven and in grade eight years, is to teach them to let it go. I know that sounds really weird to say that. But they come to class with this notion of whether they’re good in art or not. And they have to let that go. Because it’s not about whether you’re good at it, whatever they believe that to be… it’s a matter of how you can express yourself! So we start off, and it’s so funny… they get a stack of newsprint, like scrap paper… they stand up and get a pencil. And all they do is… they draw circles! That’s all they do! And it doesn’t matter if yours went off the table, but they all start off so confined. Then they just, they’re all about it! They just let it go! They let it go. That’s what art is. It’s being able to take those risks, and being comfortable with it! They’re told to hold a pencil in a certain way all their lives, and here I am, telling them to hold it at the very end and use your whole arm! Like how do you let go of that? But you have to.”

Chervin’s meditation on what it means to create art was inspiring to listen to as a researcher. I was surprised by her reflective capacity to relate exactly what the students coming into her
intermediate visual arts classroom might need to be eased in and have their learning scaffolded. She explained that because she has worked so hard at establishing a comfortable and open atmosphere, personal ideas were then welcomed and students became highly engaged in their art-making. To be a reflective and perceptive practitioner who is willing to decipher the needs of his or her students is critical in establishing a strong visual arts program, where students can feel comfortable in working with their teacher through the steps of the creative process.

**Effectiveness**

In seeking to understand teachers’ self-efficacy, I needed to understand how teachers perceived their own abilities in dealing with any apparent challenges in their visual arts classrooms. Though my other themes contribute to building a picture of teachers’ self-efficacy, through their background, perceived challenges, strengths and coping strategies, it was important to understand how teachers related their own effectiveness, according to their measures of confidence and comfort.

*Teacher and Student Receptivity*

A key concern for all of these teachers in creating an effective visual arts program was the concern for their student’s receptivity to any given project. All of my participants referred to students’ happiness and pride in their work as their priority and a chief indicator of a lesson’s success. Maria explained that the success of a visual art lesson would be “based on students’ reactions…or their end results. You know, are they happy? Or did they feel they just had to do it? Because then it’s not fun…If you don’t think of a good enough activity, you kind of
disappoint them.” Maria’s desire to appeal to her students’ interests was one that Chervin related that she also had. She explained that although she does focus on fundamentals in art, her students’ artwork was always unique in its expression:

“Fundamentals are taught, but the end product is always different. Their final product for grade eight art is absolutely fascinating and mind-blowing. One of the expectations that they have is to address a social justice issue and express their thoughts about it. And for that, that’s free reign…And the end product is just…you can’t imagine that it’s a grade eight who had created it. Because I think one of the things that they’re not accredited for is having an opinion. They understand things that they just don’t get accredited for, and you get to see that in their art.”

In giving her intermediate students an opportunity to express their opinions through their art, Chervin realized the value of empowerment found in art-making. When students gained a comfort in using the techniques that Chervin taught, they were then able to apply their understandings to express their visions towards potentially sensitive issues through multimodal ways: “It’s also the environment of the classroom. What ends up happening is that, we’re very open…I don’t know how it happens every year, but they get very comfortable.” She explained that the necessity of art lies in its power as “an outlet” for students who might not feel as comfortable with other forms of popular expression, such as writing:

“There’s a different kind of understanding that your brain needs to express. You know you can focus on the technical and be logistical the way math is, the way language is, but art requires a different way of thinking, because it requires your body to do something different, that it gets developed out of. As
a child you get to do make-belief, you get to be creative, you get to explore,
you get to play! And you have this world of ideas, it doesn’t matter, you’re
make-believing and you’re having fun with that. As you get older, that
gets thrown out of the window, and you’re told to be very technical, and you’re
told to follow the lines, and you’re told you have to colour IN those lines…
Essentially, you’re born to be creative, you’re born to be expressive! I just feel
as though that needs to be brought back, and the need to have that outlet,
because it’s a necessary outlet. And it’s essential to who they are! But they’ve
been taught otherwise. So it’s our job to hone them back into that goal.”

Art’s capacity to appeal to the socio-emotional aspects within students’ identities was
also what Catherine believed makes visual arts vital to students’ learning: “It’s another area for
them to shine where they might not feel as comfortable in other subject areas…Their art always
turns out so beautifully. You see them with such pride. It’s another way of building up students’
confidence.” One of the strategies that Catherine explained increased her students’ receptivity in
visual arts class was instilling the concept of “the growth mindset”:

“We’ve been talking a lot about growth mindset in our classrooms, as opposed
to a fixed mindset. So we’ve done a lot of looking at how to change our
language… the students feel comfortable speaking openly about their areas of,
what they see as an area of need and what their goals are…So they knew mine
was art, and I was able to say to them, well why do you think Madame feels
that way? And they could easily tell me or guess, because I hadn’t told them
my background and why I felt that way…well you don’t practice, you’re
negative about it, you say bad things about yourself, someone might have made
fun of you, maybe I didn’t take a lot of courses in it… So then, we had a big
discussion around it, but looking mostly at how I can’t control some things, but
I can control how I feel or how I respond or react to somebody else’s
comments…”

Catherine’s empathetic connection, shared with students, allowed her to work alongside them in
developing their strengths, as well as working on their individual goals. Having students realize
the normalcy in constantly growing in one’s aptitudes through her own modelling shows this
teacher’s openness to realize her own self-efficacy, surpassing any perceived limitations she
might have as a visual arts teacher.

*Teacher Confidence and Comfort*

The self-efficacy of teachers is largely dependent on their own ideas about their
confidence and comfort while teaching the subject matter in their classrooms. I expected that the
strength of a visual arts background might impact the comfort and confidence of my participants
to some degree. I was shocked to find that all of the participants, regardless of their personal
background, rated their confidence levels as moderately high. Maria explained that, “every year
gets better I guess. You mean new teachers, you get different ideas, too. So your confidence is
built up for sure.” She rated herself a four and a half to five on a scale of one to five in being
confident enough to execute a lesson, but reasoned that the scale runs lower as she scrambles in
her anxiety to find resources to teach her visual arts lessons; she felt less confident in her ability
to find engaging material for her students, affecting the quality of her teaching. She also
measured her comfort level high, but afterward made the realization that her comfort level was
relative to her personal experiences and exposure; she mentioned worrying about not challenging
some of the students in her class because her lessons might be restricted by her own comfort levels. Maria had found a way to cope with teaching visual arts over the years, despite her limited background, by relying on teaching lessons that she felt are at a comfortable level for her. In following this approach, she explained that she feels her instruction, though limited by experience, has been effective: “I’ve never had an art lesson that went into a total disaster, where I said, forget it, this is way too hard! Let’s scrap that idea! I’ve done that with other things, but not with art.”

Catherine also related feeling high levels of comfort in her visual arts instruction, explaining that “you definitely gain a comfort level, the more you go, the different kinds of things you try...you see the results and pride in your students.” Connecting her own comfort to the confidence and success felt by her students, she allowed that to be her gauge in measuring her efficacy. Interestingly, her feelings of high self-efficacy, as well as Maria’s, superseded Chervin’s, who has some visual arts background; this further grounded my understanding of self-efficacy as being relative to each individual teacher. Chervin explained that: “I know I have more to learn, so when it comes to even some of the technical things I want to deliver to the class, I have to practice that first. So when I’m comfortable with it, that’s possibly when I’ll bring it into the classroom. I can’t say I’m there yet.” Allowing the necessary openness and time for experimentation in visual arts as a way of building a repertoire of lessons to teach her class, Chervin drew her self-efficacy through her creative energies.
Overview

In relating my findings to these four general themes of my research, it becomes apparent that teacher confidence and comfort levels are very closely related to the effectiveness of the ways in which they cope when faced with challenges in the visual arts classroom. In my interviews with the three participants, each at midpoints in their careers with a great many years of teaching experience, I gained immeasurable insight into how each teacher has learned to cope with the different kinds of challenges they have faced in teaching with minimal visual arts background.

In seeking to answer my guiding research question, which asks how elementary teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs affect how they teach visual arts education in their classrooms, I learned that all of my participants felt relatively effective in their teaching. This shows the relativistic nature of self-efficacy because despite using a variety of different methods for arts instruction, they felt similar levels of self-efficacy. Chervin was constantly pushing herself to experiment with new ideas in her visual arts classroom, while Maria felt fixed in her limited comfort zone. It became apparent that self-efficacy connected more to a teacher’s development than to the specific ways in which they taught. When the teachers had first started their teaching careers their self-efficacy was lower, and as individuals they each developed their practices using different strategies. As their self-efficacy grew with experience, their ongoing practice continued with their unique differences. Chervin used an experimental-based approach while Maria, in contrast, used a research-based approach. In developing an understanding of how self-efficacy affects teacher development, it was necessary to consider how effectively teachers dealt with the challenges they encountered in their teaching.
Each teacher’s self-efficacy beliefs played a great role in influencing the ways that challenges were faced in their classrooms. One similarity between teachers with higher perceived self-efficacy was that they spoke more to their redeeming qualities and the practices they felt they were doing well, more so than focusing on any apparent challenges. Though the challenges for teachers in their mid-careers are still aplenty, including time limitations, a lack of ideas and materials, these seem to be secondary to the challenge most concerning for teachers, which involves encouraging their students’ creativity. Chervin, whose passion has driven her to pursue further visual arts professional development in her career, still expressed a degree of challenge in motivating students’ creativity in her intermediate visual arts program. Maria having the least experience, also spoke to this gap in student expression and confidence, struggling to heighten motivation in her own classroom. All teachers, regardless of their knowledge of visual arts, showed their own measure of self-efficacy linked to the self-efficacy of their students. This area was one that teachers’ continuously referred back to as their measure for their own self-efficacy, which fluctuated depending on how successfully their students felt that they performed in a visual arts lesson. As the teachers relayed their stories, I realized that lower self-efficacy due to inexperience, as well as having to overcome new challenges, helps drive teachers to self-improve and adapt their practice, while a higher self-efficacy may incline a teacher’s practice to remain unchanged as they rely on methods they have had success with. This study suggests that teachers who are not as certain in their self-efficacy strive to improve their practice, whereas those who feel good enough as they are, do not.

Teachers improved their self-efficacy by drawing on their strengths built from their years of experience; they were better able to use their curriculum knowledge to make cross-curricular links between subject areas and were more proactive about seeking out other teachers for
support. Teachers with high self-efficacy in their visual arts instruction are more committed to their practice and recognize the value of art education in students’ lives. Finally, teachers with a higher self-efficacy are more flexible in their practice, becoming more willing to encourage students’ interests and voice as a means of empowerment in their art-making. Teachers who often referred to their students’ confidence as a measure for their own self-efficacy, spoke to being motivated to raise their own self-efficacy levels by developing their abilities; by modeling for students how they could move past any notion of fixed or limited ability in visual arts, this worked to spur a cycle of positive affirmation and encouragement, vital to the visual arts classroom.
Chapter 5: Insights

Introduction

This qualitative research study has revealed many significant insights about the nature of self-efficacy and how it affects elementary teachers’ ability to cope with struggles related to visual arts instruction. The aim of this final chapter is to connect the findings discussed in the previous chapter to the ideas and theories of the researchers explored in the literature review, in an effort to draw possible implications for the teaching profession. The chapter also includes suggestions for further study, and my concluding statements as the researcher.

Reflection

In my interviews with three experienced grade four to eight teachers, all of whom had minimal visual arts backgrounds prior to beginning their careers, I was greatly informed by my participants’ unique personal backgrounds and varying levels of exposure and interest in the arts, all of which affected their feelings of effectiveness as arts educators. In categorizing my insights under the four themes of Personal Background Experiences, Challenges, Strengths and Strategies, and Effectiveness, I was able to select relevant codes and use them to understand more thoroughly how each of these themes responded to one another. For example, as I identified the areas that were perceived as challenges by these three teachers, I actively looked for opportunities to connect these challenges with the strengths and coping strategies that they were willing to employ, as informed by their self-efficacy. I observed a variety of coping
strategies implemented by all of my participants due to the appreciative nature of my questions, all of which aimed to highlight the positive abilities of generalist teachers in their visual arts instruction experiences.

**Personal Background Experiences**

By considering the subcategories of *Education, Personal Experiences, Art Appreciation,* and *Professional Development,* I was able to gain an in-depth understanding of how my participants’ past experiences and interests have informed their present-day self-efficacy in visual arts instruction. As defined by researchers, self-efficacy concerns the teacher’s beliefs in organizing and executing courses of actions to promote the desirable results of involvement and learning in students (Bandura, 1997; Garvis & Pendergast, 2011). Informing teacher self-efficacy in teaching the arts are a number of factors, some of which concern past experiences, quality of pre-service teacher education, professional development and a perceived low status of the subject (Garvis & Pendergast, 2010, 2011; Davies, 2009; Gatt & Karppinen, 2014; Alter, Hays, O’Hara, 2009). With varying levels of exposure to the arts prior to their careers, my participants’ self-efficacy was, in fact, observed to be affected in various degrees with the struggles they faced in their classrooms. All of the teachers related that they had enjoyed visual arts experiences when they were younger, which showed that they had experienced the appreciation of the intrinsic values found in art-making. This related to what researchers (McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras & Brooks, 2004) have stated about intrinsic values, which offer positive benefits of happiness and joy as felt by the individuals practicing the arts. Through intrinsic experiences, participants developed a capacity to perceive and judge for themselves, to
participate imaginatively, and empathize with others (McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras & Brooks, 2004). In feeling and understanding art’s intrinsic value, all teachers could then articulate an appreciation of art’s value as a unique means of communication and expression for students, while offering them the opportunity to be emotionally and sensorially affected and engaged as they learn. This contrasted with Garvis, Twigg and Pendergast’s (2011) study, where there was a concern that early childhood education teachers may now know the value of an arts education. This suggested that teachers’ understanding of art’s value is developed through teaching experience.

Rich, intrinsic experiences are identified by Smithrim and Upitis (2002) as being of prime importance in impacting teachers’ self-efficacy in arts education. It should be noted that intrinsic experiences cannot be forced on individuals, but rather can be instilled over time, through subsequent exposures and meaningful guidance. Maria and Catherine were both participants whose interest in the arts had dissipated as they grew into adulthood, influencing their disinterest in furthering their arts education. This study relates to Garvis, Twigg and Pendergast’s (2011) study which found beginning teachers with little pre-service arts training to have, consequently, low self-efficacy in art education. This study differs, however, in showing how self-efficacy improves with experience. In pursuing professional development, participants in both studies described limited opportunities, where “the bulk of what is offered has to do with literacy and numeracy,” as Catherine explained, identifying the arts as marginalized subjects not often pursued by teachers in their careers. The helpless attitudes and perceived lack of support displayed by teachers in this study align with the findings of Garvis and Pendergast (2010) who found that many beginning teachers felt a lack of financial support, assistance and professional development for teaching in the arts, in general, as compared to areas such as literacy and
numeracy. Chervin, who related feeling the most intrinsic value in visual arts experiences throughout her life, was motivated to take limited arts coursework in her early education, supporting Smithrim and Upitis’ (2002) claims in the favour of intrinsic experiences for teachers’ self-efficacy development. In a similar vein, Lummis, Morris & Paolino (2014) found that arts intervention needed to build intrinsic motivation to be successful in the long-term impact of teachers’ self-efficacy throughout their career. However, Chervin explained that she had to forego continuing with these courses due to an attributed negative bias to their perceived non-utility. Her personal interest in visual arts then transferred into her career, motivating her to take additional qualifications courses to further her professional development, and affecting her self-efficacy in teaching visual art substantially. The continuous intrinsic value she felt towards visual arts was displayed in her passion and commitment, as well as in her related successes with students in the classroom.

Researchers have claimed that the self-efficacy of a teacher tends to be resistant to change once developed (Garvis & Pendergast, 2011), however this contrasts with the multiple points presented throughout my interviews with teachers that showed this not to be the case. Over the years, it seemed that teachers had gained self-efficacy in reflecting on their experiences and in proactively implementing changes in their visual arts programs. For example, Catherine told of a negative experience in her childhood when she received a teacher’s critical appraisal of her efforts in a visual arts assessment. This experience contributed to her developing the self-perception that she was not a particularly “artsy” person, discouraging her from pursuing visual arts on her own, and thus having a limiting effect on her intrinsically valuing the visual arts later as an adult. From this experience, however, she was able to relate feeling an empathetic connection to her students in their artistic efforts, having also become wary of unstructured peer
feedback in visual arts which might result in damaging commentary by students. The learning gained from a personal negative experience showed Catherine’s willingness to grow and develop her self-efficacy in her visual arts instruction and assessment skills. Catherine’s low self-efficacy in her childhood had not prevented her from developing a reflective stance on how visual arts education should be executed in her classroom: with much careful deliberation in avoiding any degree of harm to students’ own self perceptions. One of the surprising elements of this research study has been in finding many instances where the teachers, who might have begun their careers with low self-efficacy in visual arts, could now speak to having developed it considerably years later.

**Challenges**

Without a specialist background in visual arts before beginning their careers, the challenges of elementary teachers teaching visual arts were aplenty. Many of these challenges were identified and listed in subcategories labeled as *Time Limitations, Ideas, Materials and Student Creativity*. Despite the fact that all teachers could speak to the many valuable benefits of the arts in education, this relates to what researchers have previously stated, in admitting that “teachers’ beliefs and practices do not always coincide” (Upitis, Smithrim, Patteson & Meban, 2001). This discrepancy was most readily seen in the amount of time that teachers explained they allocated for visual arts instruction in their schedules. It was evident that the pressure of a content-dense teaching schedule regretfully left visual arts instruction as a rare occurrence in classrooms, contributing to its marginalized position in schools. This realization supports
Eisner's (1985) reflection on time as one of teachers’ most precious resources, referring to it as a valuable commodity in schools:

What we choose to ‘spend’ time on says something about what we value.

Decisions about curriculum content and the amount of time devoted to given content areas therefore not only influence the opportunities children have to learn, but they also influence what children perceive to be of value in the school and in the culture-at-large. (p.122)

As teachers devoted less time to visual arts instruction, this contributed to the idea of art as a dispensable commodity rather than a necessity, which lent itself to teachers feeling less inclined to take professional development courses in their careers in an effort to develop their self-efficacy in this area.

When students only have access to art on rare occasions, for as little as fifty minutes a week in some cases, this supports what researchers and advocates claim; that the arts are not being taken as seriously as they should, furthering the stigma of art being viewed as “an impractical break from serious learning,” rather than an essential part of that learning (Siegesmund, 2002, p.24). Teachers also admitted to having time-allocation guidelines suggested to them by individual school board policies, speaking to the larger forces at work influencing teacher planning decisions. This also supports what Eberle (2011) referred to as the burden of a scripted curriculum that is intensely structured and content-dense, influencing the allocation of time that teachers might have devoted to learning in art, and worked against a potential value of flexibility and creative play for both students and teachers. Despite the limited time and availability of art opportunities offered in classrooms, there was a general tone of complacency in the commentary of teachers as they related to its adequacy and fairness, considering the other
pressing demands of a content-heavy curriculum. Art has a habit of becoming less of a priority for teachers who must work to meet accountability standards in core learning areas such as literacy and numeracy.

The priority of a practical mindset in schools was linked to the problematic challenges of a lack of time, materials, and parental concern. Along with finding time to teach art, teachers also struggled in collecting materials and resources, which were often limited by budget allocations driven by the individual school focus. The general tone of complacency found in teachers towards the time allocated to their visual arts instruction could be related to the impression of art as an unnecessary frill, impractical and offering little sense of stability next to the more valuable and worthy goals of a practical education, related to learning in the core subject areas. This supports Gullatt (2008) whose study on arts integration points to the lack of movement in curriculum change attributed to a general apathetic attitude found in “a lack of desire by the public for their children to have exposure in school” (p.219). When there is a lack of parental support for arts-related goals, consequently school boards reflect these apathetic attitudes, which are passed down to teachers and students, furthering the stigma. Gullatt’s research, much like my own, is aimed at deconstructing this apparent stigma, in the hopes of instilling a deepened appreciation of art’s value in education. As parents and school administrators may tend to focus on the seemingly practical aims of education, Siegesmund (2002) relates that, “good art teachers recognize the poetic as an entryway to this realm” (p. 27).

Teachers spoke also to the corresponding stresses of collecting exciting ideas and resources to challenge their students in their visual arts instruction. Maria, with the least amount of exposure to the arts before beginning her career, made reflective statements towards the anxiety in seeking out resources in her efforts to challenge all of the students in her classes who
might have had more exposure to visual art. Maria’s self-efficacy was affected negatively because she wanted to find projects that would challenge her students, which were difficult for her to find without an arts background to help her focus her searches. She wanted to avoid giving her students simple tasks of experimenting with the elements of art, as is done in the primary levels, as she believed students might feel these skills were too elementary. I was surprised to see that these would be the very same activities that Chervin related in being forced to introduce to her intermediate students, as a means of accustoming them to “letting go” of their rigid perceptions towards art-making. Also, it was interesting to see that the Ontario revised Arts Curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009) presented itself as a challenge for Maria by its limited support, while in other cases, Catherine and Chervin related to its inherent freedom as a starting point for teachers. In this case, teachers’ experience and exposure to the arts impacted their self-efficacy to engage and challenge students in their classrooms.

In resorting to a student-centred model of learning, Chervin related feeling at ease in planning art lessons, drawing on students’ interests in designing art projects while also emphasizing student accountability in creating original works of art immersed in their own personal meaning and vision. Against the “cookie-cutter” types of art that ask students to produce simple replicas of original artworks under the prescriptive directions of a teacher, Chervin related her preference for “creation” projects, which relates to what Siegesmund (2002) refers to as the student’s “mindful attention to a task,” and are filled with opportunities for visual problem solving, recognition of multiple solutions, and justification for choices made in one’s artwork. In allowing students to participate in the process of “illustration” rather, where the teacher has worked out all the choices and students create a similar final product, teachers limit students’ creativity substantially. In sacrificing her personal time to guide students through
opportunities of creative problem-solving, Chervin stressed the skills of responsibility and accountability in students as they created their unique works of art.

The challenge to stimulate students’ creativity was expressed by all of the teachers, who spoke to the limited, rigid mindsets that students have when it comes to creating artwork. Teachers explained that they often had to refrain from using teacher samples to guide students to a final product, as this resulted in many student-made replicas of the original artwork. In an effort to promote student creativity and motivation, teachers struggled in effectively guiding students through the creative process. Accustomed to other areas of learning that rely on finding a single, correct answer, students often relayed their struggles and low self-efficacy in art-making. Working with students through the creative process, as stated in the arts curriculum, requires “a considerable expenditure of time and energy and a good deal of perseverance,” reflected in a strong teacher self-efficacy (Ontario Ministry of Education, p.7). Teachers’ work with students is made critically important, especially for children between the ages of 8 and 13, as they enter developmental stages of intense self-criticism and self-awareness with regards to their art-making. Prominent arts theorist, Viktor Lowenfield (1947) stated that as students enter the Dawning Realism and Pseudo-Naturalistic developmental stages, they become fixated on a desire to transfer images exactly as they appear in their environment. If unguided, this can be discouraging to students’ self-perceptions about their creativity if the product does not meet their expectations. The common difficulty in challenging students’ creativity and self-concept pointed to the necessity of having teachers’ competencies supported with more effective professional development opportunities. This struggle related to what Hallam, Des Hewitt & Buxton (2014) found as a reported insecurity in teachers linking to a shortfall in children’s educational experience in art.
Strengths and Strategies

With many years of experience, each individual teacher related to a number of strengths and strategies for coping with their minimal visual arts backgrounds. By drawing out subcategories of Cross-curricular integration, Resources and Technology, Teacher Support, Assessment, and Reflective Practitioner, I was able to easily identify the positive attributes of all of my participants, falling in line with the appreciative direction of this research study. In struggling with time limitations in visual arts instruction, all teachers spoke to the rich cross-curricular connections they were making in an effort to integrate the arts and promote student learning in all subject areas. By making these cross-curricular connections, teachers demonstrated an appreciation for the instrumental value of the arts, which employed arts experiences in achieving benefits in non-arts areas (McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras & Brooks, 2004). With limited time to teach visual arts, teachers were forced to utilize art for its instrumental value alone, further contributing to its marginalization in schools, as argued by researchers (Eisner, 1999; Siegesmund, 1998; Bobick & DiCindio, 2012). Teachers explained how they would use art as a tool to develop learning in other subject areas, such as literacy and numeracy. As referenced in Ontario’s Arts Curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009), this integrated process denoted learning through the arts, where aspects of the arts could develop students’ skills and abilities in other subject areas. Catherine explained that she would often use connections to other subject areas as a foundation to teach related themes or concepts, as this followed “a natural way for students to learn.” Art became a useful way for teachers to initiate
cross-disciplinary integration, avoid fragmented instruction and teach to real-world learning, as it supported students’ authentic learning and exploration in different subject areas.

As students were exposed to this cross-curricular mode of education, they were also engaged through differentiated and experiential learning, as emphasized by Maria. In understanding the benefits of art as a form of communication and expression appealing to the multiple intelligences model, she appreciated the holistic value of art integration in meeting all of her students’ needs. She also related how the arts promoted students’ retention of information, signaling students’ mastery of content, as they were able to understand concepts more fully after they had explored them with personal connection and emotional investment through their art. As art engaged the sense-based and emotional aspects of learning, there was also value for teachers to use art as a universal tool for communication, to promote learning in ELL and FSL students. As outlined in Ontario’s Arts curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009), the benefits of learning through the arts are immeasurable, fostering students’ sensory, cognitive, emotional and motor capacities; however, in pointing to the inherent controversy as related by researchers and art advocates, it should not be the only approach that teachers rely on, which is prone to happen in cases of teacher unawareness and pressures from content-dense curricula. Teachers should balance their teaching of art in a way that can be supported through practice and development of skills and techniques, appreciating it for its rich culture and history, as well as integrating it into subject areas for beneficial holistic learning of students.

Similar to Maria’s sensitivity to her students’ needs, Chervin related the benefits of integrating student interest into her visual arts programming. By taking suggestions for projects and pitching new ideas to students, she made an effort to tailor her visual arts program development around her students’ interests. Chervin’s ease with content knowledge informs her
self-efficacy, as demonstrated by Garvis and Pendergast (2011) in their study of teachers, finding that the stronger the content knowledge in subject areas, the more likely that the teacher would engage in teaching the subject. Offering an art project as an opportunity for students to express their opinions about a social justice topic, Chervin demonstrated how art could be a tool for promoting a responsive pedagogy centered on students’ opinions and values. By bringing in personal experiences and current events and letting them inspire her practice, this supports what researchers Graham and Rees (2014) describe as a necessity of teacher receptivity and adaptability in weaving random with intention to offer opportunities for creative play to her students, promoting unanticipated outcomes in the creative process. Chervin’s self-efficacy inspired her to feel more open in experimenting with ideas, and becoming a learner alongside her students. Maria also spoke to valuing constructivist learning opportunities, by inviting technology into her classroom in an effort to expose students to different artistic techniques and deepen her own knowledge as a result. This contrasted with the lack of practice contributing to a low self-efficacy found in beginning teachers in Garvis, Twigg and Pendegast’s (2011) study; this strengthens the idea that the longer teachers practice teaching the arts, the more practice seems to increase their self-efficacy. All teachers spoke to the benefits of technological support in instilling a space of engagement in their visual arts lessons, reflecting the 21st century learning model now occupying schools. Teachers also related their gratitude for being able to search online for resources, as well as relying on teacher support in constructing their lessons, both of which were important in furthering their self-efficacy as arts teachers.

One of the more valuable insights gained in this research study has been in learning how teachers view assessment in visual arts; answering questions of whether they see it as more of a debilitating challenge or a supportive strategy to employ in their classrooms. Teachers related
their confidence in using assessment as a means to promote student accountability and motivation in their art-making. I had expected that teachers might struggle with assessment in their visual arts practice, as many artist educators had previously related to the non-utility of collecting numerical data in the arts, as they involved, rather, “the discernment of qualities” (Kellman, 1999, p.43). Despite this, at the mid-point in their careers, teachers’ self-efficacy had developed to the point where they now felt relatively comfortable with the nature of assessment in visual arts; they employed assessment as a general guide in favour of students’ learning, as they co-created success criteria with their students, connecting to learning goals. Appreciating authenticity in art-making, Chervin explained that multiple students could create very different and unique art products following the same generalized success criteria they had created with the teacher.

By introducing success criteria at the beginning of a visual arts lesson, this relates to Siegesmund’s (2002) call for accountability to be seen as a beginning, rather than an endpoint. It was important that teachers identified the need for balanced assessment of both process and product, including students’ self-assessments in the form of artist statements. This is especially relevant in the case of visual arts education, as Eisner (1985) relates his uneasiness with conventional forms of evaluation, as they tend to focus exclusively on the products of student learning while neglecting “the conditions, context, and interactions that led to these consequences” (p.148). Success criteria were used as the basis for thoughtful and considerate peer feedback during gallery walks and student-teacher conferences. The findings in this area showed that teachers used assessment to empower students to communicate their ideas through the elements and principles of design. This supports what Siegesmund (2002) related to a successful visual arts education, which has students asking themselves, “Why is this an activity
worth doing? What deeper learning does this facilitate?” (p.27). This line of questioning allowed for art education to be taken seriously by asking students and teachers to engage in critical and visual reasoning processes leading to enriched, meaningful learning experiences.

**Effectiveness**

Informing teachers’ self-efficacy in influencing students’ learning were their feelings of confidence, comfort, motivation, and self-knowledge (Garvis & Pendergast, 2011). In encountering reflective commentary made by the participants throughout my interviews, teachers demonstrated an ability to be open and critical about their practices, inviting gains in self-knowledge. By participating in this research study, the teacher participants had shown a willingness to turn towards self-reflection and growth. Overall, teachers expressed feeling that their self-efficacy in teaching visual arts had increased over their years of experience. In reflecting on my participants’ answers, I had also found that self-efficacy measures were highly relative, where one individual might have expressed feeling higher feelings of effectiveness than another with perhaps more of a visual arts background; this finding demonstrated a possible inclination for teachers to overestimate their actual teaching skills, which Garvis and Pendergast (2011) relate in their study causes teachers “to expend effort and persist in the face of setbacks” helping them to make most of the skill and capabilities they do possess (p.10). As related by Maria in a thoughtful self-reflection of her own abilities, self-efficacy was largely related to the amount of risk-taking the teacher was willing to invite into their practice. As she felt a need to remain in her comfort zone, she explained feeling highly confident in her practice, but this might not mean that she was the most effective of teachers in meeting the needs of all her students in
visual arts instruction. Chervin, who felt the highest level of intrinsic motivation towards art, felt personal experimentation to be a necessary element in her teaching, which allowed her to further her practice, but left her feeling she still had much to learn in the subject area. In feeling the most intrinsic value in the arts, Chervin was one participant who demonstrated that having positive experiences in art contributed to a stronger intent on ensuring that students also have similar positive experiences. This supports what Garvis and Pendergast (2011) found about teachers who had greater self-perceived competence towards certain subjects were “more likely to expend motivation and time in teaching that content area” (p. 11). All teachers agreed that fostering a positive response in their students through their visual arts instruction was directly linked to their feelings of self-efficacy as teachers. This finding was supported by research conducted by Garvis and Pendergast (2011), which found that a “strong teacher self efficacy has also been consistently related to teacher behavior, students attitudes and student achievement” (p.10). Teachers base their feelings of effectiveness on their students’ feelings of success, it implies that teachers should take more risks and push themselves beyond their comfort zones so that they may continue to improve progressively throughout their years of teaching.

Teacher and student receptivity are responsive to one another. In the creative process, teachers and students feed off of one another’s feelings of self-efficacy. This relates to why researchers have cautioned against teachers de-intellectualizing the subject and spurring the danger of a cyclical problem of failure for arts education (Garvis, Twigg & Pendergast, 2011). However, this research study contrasts with what has been found before; by adapting to newer models of student-directed learning in classrooms, teachers realized that they inevitably had a place in modelling the necessary skills and competencies required to achieve success in learning. As Catherine demonstrated in her own classroom, by modelling to students the benefits of a
growth mindset approach to learning, students were shown the necessary qualities and positive traits of a lifelong learner. This positive, supportive strategy was responsive to the development stages that students were in, where they were prone to intense self-criticism (Lowenfield, 1947). By using herself as an example in developing a growth mindset over a fixed mindset in relation to artistic self-concept, Catherine explained the explicit differences between the circumstances that students could control versus those which they could not. Therefore, as teachers understand the need for more risk-taking involved in exploring art as a means to instill appreciation in themselves and correspondingly in their students, a reflected increase in self-efficacy is to result, allowing for a positive cycle of self-development and change in visual arts instruction over time.

**Implications/ Recommendations**

As this study observed, teachers’ perceptions regarding their efficacy were linked to the success felt by students in their visual art lessons. As teachers progress throughout their careers, they improve their confidence and comfort levels with experience in visual arts instruction. In seeking to answer my research question about how teacher self-efficacy affects their visual arts instruction, I learned that teachers have many challenges that they handle by drawing on their strengths and various coping strategies. These challenges are either self-imposed by teachers’ perceived lack of experience in visual arts, or they are imposed by exterior circumstances, including school budget and time limitations. Despite the variability of these challenges, teachers showed a willingness, stemming from their self-efficacy beliefs, to work past their struggles as a means of developing their practice. As all teachers related similar levels of self-efficacy, regardless of their personal background experiences and exposure, I recognized a level of
relativity in their responses, which spoke to the advantages and disadvantages of a high level of self-efficacy as a general indicator; with a higher perceived self-efficacy, the less likely teachers felt inclined to improve their practice for the better. However, if teachers were to have a realistic self-efficacy, they could continue to work on these challenges in an effort to benefit their self-development. With effective and informed assessment strategies, teachers might have a reliable and accurate self-perception of their abilities. It then becomes all the more crucial that assessment be well-developed by teachers, so students can be carefully guided towards feelings of success, which so often dictate the measure of teacher self-efficacy.

Finally, the question remains as to how pre-service teachers with minimal visual arts background and exposure to the arts can increase their self-efficacy quickly and efficiently as early as possible in their careers. As all teachers expressed, there is a need for more professional development opportunities to be offered to teachers throughout their careers, as well as more intensive support given to pre-service teachers in arts education. In relating their advice to beginning teachers, my participants offered many valuable considerations, several of which are listed below.

*What should pre-service teachers do to improve their self-efficacy in their visual arts practice?*

Prior to beginning their careers, teachers should aim to seek out further support in arts education in their pre-service programs. Once they have begun their practice, it is vital that teachers connect with, and build a strong support system of other practitioners in their school. By bringing in artist members of the community into their classrooms, teachers and students can become more aware and appreciative of arts-based career options. By avoiding teacher-directed, prescriptive instruction, teachers allow for student-directed learning and creative play to take
place, increasing student accountability. Teachers who employ a responsive pedagogy in planning projects based on students’ interests, current events and trends build a more inclusive and engaged classroom. In experimenting and trying new things both inside and outside of the classroom, new experiences can inspire new ideas and approaches for beginning teachers as they become learners that explores the subject alongside students. It is vital that teachers practice the necessary technical skills required in a given art project beforehand to gain familiarity and comfort with the process and materials of a visual arts lesson. Beginning teachers also need to recognize a need for balance in their visual arts program, involving approaches of learning in the arts, learning through the arts, learning about the arts. With the aim of fostering connections between art and other subject areas, teachers are encouraged to begin with themes and concepts as a means of encouraging authentic learning. Teachers are also encouraged to begin to collect resources in the form of art magazines, websites, artist blogs, and videos as early as possible in their careers. It is encouraged that they gain familiarity with the arts terminology in guiding students through the creative process and avoiding de-intellectualizing the subject area. Teachers should also strive to give students regular, frequent opportunities to show their understanding through art so that it may become a natural part of classroom learning. As students are exposed to regular art appreciation experiences, these should be accompanied by supportive qualitative reasoning prompts and opportunities. By incorporating a steady routine and setting the tone early for student learning in visual arts, teachers encourage a respectful classroom environment during visual arts lessons.

In order to develop their self-efficacy, teachers are also encouraged to seek out further Professional Development opportunities, and advocate for the arts in schools as they bring them up in conversations with parents and school administrators. Assessment is a useful strategy for
teachers to support their visual arts practice; they are encouraged to use co-created success
criteria in visual arts lessons as a means of structured support, and incorporate a growth mindset
in the classroom by giving opportunities for students to write their goals, self-assess, and
understand their growth, as they realize their abilities and self-concepts are not fixed.

Further study

With regards to further studies, there are a number ways that this research study could be
extended. As this study only focused on how three individual teachers teach visual arts in their
classrooms and how they employ various coping strategies in dealing with challenges. It would
prove informative to see the results of a quantitative study measuring a much greater sample of
teachers’ self-efficacy in their mid to late-careers; with this information, new initiatives could be
developed to help support teachers of the arts in the form of professional development
opportunities throughout their careers. Another extension of this research might be to focus on a
longitudinal study of teachers’ practices, examining their self-efficacy development over the
course of their careers. Such a study could include more focus on looking at teachers with
students from different grades and age groups separately. This would benefit the understanding
of how teachers cope differently with students of different ages and developmental stages.
Further studies might also feature participants from schools with students of both high and low
socioeconomic status, to examine how environment might affect teachers’ coping strategies.

A limitation of this study was its focus on teachers with mid-career experience in
teaching visual arts with no specialized background prior to beginning their careers. I would
have liked to pursue the opportunity to learn about the self-efficacy of teachers early on and later
on in their careers also. To include teachers with high self-efficacy in visual arts, with specialist visual arts background, at the beginning of the careers would provide further insight with regards to their useful strategies and beneficial qualities as art teachers.

Given that student self-concept is directly linked to teacher self-concept, a further study is needed to investigate how teachers with high self-efficacy support their students’ creativity in visual arts. A further interest of mine is to understand how the minimal regulatory guidelines in managing an arts program impact teachers’ decisions in how they divide the approaches of learning through art, learning about art, and learning in art in their classrooms. Finally, given my own comfort and familiarity with visual arts, I decided to focus on this area especially in my research study; however, further studies might consider teacher self-efficacy in all arts areas.

Conclusion

As studies have previously demonstrated, teacher self-efficacy has the potential of impacting student learning and success. The self-concepts of limited creativity in students is a common problem related by teachers in this study, and coincides with previous research studies that present a lull in students’ development and expression in their art-making (Hallam, Des Hewitt & Buxton, 2014). Teacher self-efficacy is informed by many factors, which stand to affect students’ self-efficacy and creative self-concept. Through my research, I had witnessed numerous coping mechanisms in place by experienced teachers in visual arts, which have helped inform my practice as a teacher and hopefully the practices of others in the field. Largely influenced by the practical mindset occupying the present society in which teachers and students live, there is a need for teachers to recognize the immeasurable value of an arts education, as not
limited to a select talented few, but to all individuals as a means of expressing their innate, natural creativity. In expanding the mindset of teachers and positively influencing their self-efficacy, there is a promise for positive change with regards to how arts education is handled in schools presently and in the future.
References


APPENDICES

Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interview

Dear: _______________________

My name is Natalie Hajduk and I am currently enrolled in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto. A major component of the MT program is the completion of a research study on an important topic in education, which is to be conducted under the supervision of a professor. In my own research study, I intend to explore generalist teachers’ understandings about their strengths and challenges in their experiences in teaching visual arts lessons. In learning more about past experiences and current perspectives, I aim to discover more about teachers’ feelings of effectiveness, as well as their comfort and confidence levels with which they teach visual arts in junior/intermediate classes.

Your participation in this study involves a face-to-face interview of approximately one hour, where questions asked will relate to your strengths, challenges and coping strategies in teaching visual arts lessons. The interview can occur at a time and place that is most convenient to you. At any time during the course of the interview or later in the study, should you choose to withdraw your participation, your interview information will be erased. With your permission, the interview is to be digitally recorded and will be kept in a password-protected hard drive on the interviewer’s laptop. The information provided over the course of the interview will remain in this safe, secure location over the course of the research study and will be destroyed in a span of five years. This data will be used for the completion of my thesis, as well as in related publications or presentations after the thesis is complete. Pending its completion, a copy of the interview transcript will be sent to you to verify and approve its contents. Upon the study’s finish, a copy of my research will be forwarded to you.

By signing below, you understand that data collected from the interview will be used for the purposes of this study and any corresponding research presentations and publications. To recognize your contributions to this study, you have a choice of whether or not to have your name used, or to have it replaced with a pseudonym; if you choose to have your name used, this would honor the contributions you make to this study as a practicing educator.

Should you have any further concerns regarding this study, please contact Dr. Hilary Inwood (hilary.inwood@utoronto.ca), the professor who is overseeing my research. An additional contact is Dr. Arlo Kempf (arlo.kempf@utoronto.ca), a course instructor in the research process, who is reviewing my research as well.

If you agree to participate in this study, please sign below. I greatly appreciate your contributions.
Sincerely,

Natalie Hajduk
Candidate, Master of Teaching, OISE  
natalie.hajduk@mail.utoronto.ca  
Tel: 647-631-3507

I acknowledge that the content, as well the purpose of this research study has been fully explained to me and that any questions about it have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time from this interview or later in the course of this study, without any penalty. In result of a withdrawal, any information I have provided will be erased from the researcher’s file.

- My real name should be used in the interview transcript.
- A pseudonym should be used in the place of my name in the interview transcript.

Participant’s Name (Printed): ________________________________

Participant’s Signature: ________________________________

Date: ________________________________
Appendix B: Interview Questions

General Contextual Questions:

¥ What grade level and age level do you teach?
¥ Have you always taught this grade level?
¥ How long have you been a teacher?
¥ What subjects have you taught?
¥ What subjects do you teach now?
¥ Could you describe to me the classroom/school environment within which you teach?

Arts-based Learning Questions:

Personal Background Experiences

¥ Do you have experience in practicing any of the arts (visual arts, music, dance, drama)?
¥ Did you have any experience in the visual arts before you became a teacher?
¥ Have you taken any Professional Development courses in visual arts?
¥ Do you currently engage in the visual arts in your personal time?
  o If yes, do you feel that this helps you be a more confident teacher of art?
¥ Do you partake in any sort of art appreciation on your own time? (visit art galleries, etc.)
¥ While completing your teacher education program, was Visual Arts education a mandatory course to take?
  o If yes, do you feel that this was an adequate amount of education to help you feel comfortable in teaching visual art?
  o If no, do you wish you had more professional support in regards to arts-related teaching in the classroom?
Classroom Experiences

- Approximately how much time during a week do you devote to teaching a visual arts lesson?
  - Is this time the same as the time devoted to the learning of another subject, such as science or social studies?
- Do you feel that the time you dedicate to teaching visual arts now is adequate?
- Tell me about your recent experiences in teaching a visual arts lesson in your own classroom.
- When you do teach a visual arts lesson, do you use an integrated approach or teach it as a stand-alone subject?
  - If teaching art on its own is favored over the integrated approach, why is this a preferred way?
  - If teaching art through an integrated approach is favored, why is this a preferred way?
  - Which approach do you find is more difficult?
  - How necessary do you feel it is to make connections to other subject areas?
- What sorts of behaviors do you observe in students during a visual art activity?
  - Are students mostly receptive to a visual arts lesson?
  - Are students mostly disengaged during a visual arts lesson?
- How do you work with students who are quick to state their lack of confidence in a visual arts lesson?
- Do you have any struggles or difficulties when introducing a visual arts activity in your classroom?
  - If yes, what problems do you have and how do you cope with these?
  - If no, do you have any strengths or advantages that make organizing an arts activity an easier task for you?
- In your perspective, what does a successful visual arts lesson look like?
- What are some teaching practices that you feel you do well in the visual arts classroom?
Resources, Assessment and Communication

- When organizing a visual arts lesson, where do you get your ideas?
  - What resources do you draw from?
- Have you ever worked with a practicing artist or had one visit the school? If so, what was your experience like with the artist?
- Do you find that your school is supportive of arts related lessons (arts specialist staff, adequate supplies, budget)?
- Given the extensive curriculum for the Arts, as revised in 2009, do you find that you have enough information to help you teach visual arts effectively?
- How comfortable do you feel assessing students’ artwork? How do you approach assessment in a visual art lesson?
- In your experience, would you say parents in this school express an interest or disinterest with regards to the learning of the arts in your classroom?

Teacher Effectiveness in Visual Arts

- Do you believe the visual arts are important to student learning? In what ways?
- How necessary do you think that visual art education is for students to learn at the junior/intermediate level (given that many studies only show the importance of play-based education during primary education)?
- Do you believe that your past experiences teaching visual arts have affected your confidence in teaching visual arts today? In what ways?
- On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate your confidence as a teacher of visual arts (1 being very unconfident, 5 being very confident)?
- On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate your sense of effectiveness as a teacher of visual arts (1 being ineffective, 5 being very effective)?
- On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate your comfort level as a teacher of visual arts (1 being very uncomfortable, 5 being very comfortable)?
- In your opinion, what makes an effective visual arts teacher?